

**INTRODUCING
NAZRUL ISLAM**

SERAJUL ISLAM CHOUDHURY

MUKTADHARA



First published in May, 1955
Second Edition July, 1959

Published by
Chittaranjan Saha
Muktadhara
[Swadhin Bangla Sahitya Parishad]
74 Farashgonj
Dacca—1
Bangladesh
Cover designed by
Nitun Kundu
Printed by
N. Huque
Alexandra S. M. Press
244, Nawabpur Road
Dacca—1
Price Taka 7·00

For

Khuku & Shiuli

This book is designed to serve as a brief introduction to the life and works of Nazrul Islam. Although it was first published in 1955, the present edition is substantially different from the first. I have read with profit most critical and biographical writings on Nazrul Islam by those who wrote before me, and I owe them a debt of gratitude.

There are a few printing errors in the book. The punctuation mark has been misplaced and the article dropped in a number of places. 1835 (p. 36 1.15) should read 1823. On p. 17 (1. 5) 'Soon after' should have been 'Afterwards'. 'Oppression' has been misspelt in 1. 13 p. 12. 'His' has become 'its' in 1. 15. p.54. I regret these and such other errors as might have escaped my notice.

Department of English
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July, 1959

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CONTENTS

I	The Background	1
II	Amidst Thunder and Storm	15
III	Nobler Than His Works	26
IV	The Blazing Comet	29
V	The Compulsive Speaker	61
VI	In An Imaginary Land	77
VII	The Singing Voice	81
VIII	The Country's Debt	87
IX	His Books	94

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND

Qazi Nazrul Islam was, more than any of the other major poets of Bengal, a poet of his times, and it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, either to account for his extraordinary popularity, or, which is more important, to understand the making of his genius, without placing him in the context of the social and cultural situation to which he belonged.

When Nazrul Islam arrived on the literary scene, Bengal, like the rest of India, was under the oppressive rule of the British colonial system, a rule that had produced many evils—economic, social and intellectual.

Economically the province was in misery. It did not have any industry worth the name. Its cottage industries had been destroyed. Its agriculture was backward, as it had always been—with the added disadvantage that the destruction of the small manufacturing industries and the disbanding of the native army had forced the population to depend on the land more than it had done ever before. The aims of the rulers were simple. As in other countries, they desired to squeeze as much revenue as the country could pay, sell as many of their goods as possible and buy raw materials for their industries as cheap as they could. They had set up a local bourgeoisie comprising their agents and employees. Members of this class enjoyed certain economic and social privileges, and they thought that they were a cultivated elite, which, in fact, they were. But the vast majority of the population, who were tillers of the soil, lived in semi-primitive darkness. There was some glamour and glitter in and around Calcutta, but the ordinary peasant of Bengal lived far away, in the villages where life meant an unending routine in

squalor and drudgery. In the nineteenth century there had taken place a kind of quickening of the intellect, resulting from the province's contact with the culture and enlightenment of England. But this awakening, complacently and picturesquely called a renaissance, was limited to the privileged elite in Calcutta, and was not anything more than the manifestation of the impact that the English culture had made on the Bengalee middle class, itself a creation of the British. Economic backwardness coupled with, and worsened by, subjugation to an alien power helped the old forces of darkness—of ignorance, superstition and mutual jealousy. In a crowded society people tend to be suspicious of each other and in a populous India, Bengal was even more crowded than the other provinces. While it is true that a population need not necessarily be a liability, and can be turned into an asset as has been done in the socialist world, in Bengal socialism was a far cry in those days; it is so even now. The rulers, moreover, were playing continually the very cruel and useful game of dividing the population, so that instead of fighting the rulers they might fight each other. And the population was indeed divided, communalism was an important fact of life.

The country was agricultural and its economy was dependent upon the manner the land was managed. Lord Cornwallis had introduced in 1793 a new system of land tenure, under which the government auctioned the land to persons making the highest bid of annual rent, retaining the right to reauction any land for which the landlord should fail to pay his tax by the appointed date. The new system turned the government into a business firm, giving it the assurance of a regular flow of land revenue. But it left the peasants entirely at the mercy of the landlords, who were given the absolute freedom to fleece the tenants in the manner they liked. Provided that they paid taxes regularly to the Government treasury, their freedom was not to be interfered with. The landlords, in their turn, gave their managers and officers unlimited freedom to collect as much taxes as they could. These unscrupulous and heartless men collected more from the peasants than they gave to the landlords, and the landlords got more than what they

paid to the treasury. Thus the system was good for all concerned, except for the helpless peasants who bore the brunt of its efficiency as their cows bore the ploughs.

The system had two other characteristics which we ought to notice here. First, it created a class of affluent absentee landlords. The landlord lived in large mansions in Calcutta ; his sons went to the newly set-up schools, drank wine, hired women, and declared to the world that they were emancipated. The father lived a more leisurely life, he slept till midday, flew pigeons from rooftops in the afternoon, and joined his friends in the evening in entertainment provided by singing and dancing girls brought from Northern India. He spent money lavishly on religious and festive occasions, not knowing any better use for it. And the money of course came from nameless peasants sweating in the sun and rain. Not infrequently the landlords lived in complete ignorance of what was happening in their estates. While they made no investment in agriculture, industrial investment was neither possible nor known.

The second notable feature of the system lay in the composition of the class of landlords. For most of them—over ninety per cent—were Hindus. This was but a natural corollary of the fact that at the time the settlement was made they were the most advanced and alert section of the community. But the Muslims, a minority elsewhere in India, were a majority in Bengal. Because they were mostly peasants they were poorer than the Hindus, from whom came the landlords as well as their employers. Consequently, compared with the Hindus they were more withdrawn from the sources of power and places of importance. The extent of this withdrawal can be seen in the fact that nowhere in the very rich literature of Bengal produced between the coming of the British and the twenties of this century do we have any satisfactory portrayal of the Muslim family life.

Literary prose was perhaps the finest outcome of the cross-fertilisation made possible by the introduction of English education in Bengal. Bankimchandra Chatterjee, one of the first graduates in Bengal and a Deputy Magistrate in the administration, wrote the first novel in the Bengali language. He knew the plight of the

peasants, was warmly sympathetic towards them, and had written memorable essays describing the heartless ways in which they were exploited. Bankimchandra also wrote essays on equality wherein he emphasized the need of bringing about a change in the hopeless lot of the peasants of Bengal. But when it came to the writing of his novels, he did not go to the peasants. On the contrary, he went either to an imaginary and coloured past or to the well-to-do middle class of the day. This failure, for so it was, was more than personal. For, if anything, it indicated a lack of intimacy between the writer and the common man. The gulf was created by class division, and it remained, in fact it widened as time went by. It is certainly significant that although the native zamindars were in most cases as hard-hearted as the European indigo-planters and in some cases even more ruthless than their European compeers, the imaginative literature of the period failed to include any picture of their exploitation. The cruelty of the indigo-planters has been portrayed, but not that of the zamindars. The reason is obvious; the writers belonged to the same class as the zamindars. It is well-known that Bankimchandra did not want the oppressed in the country to rise in revolt and change the social and political order. He regretted his writing essays on equality and even withdrew them from circulation. When a fellow writer who lived in the rural part of Bengal sent him for review a play on the zamindars, Bankimchandra wrote that he liked the book but would advise the writer to withhold its circulation lest it should incite the peasants to rise against the landlords.

English education had created a cleavage between the educated gentlemen, *bhadraloks*, and the unenlightened common man in a manner previously unknown in this country. Bankim has presented a memorable but faithful picture of the class of educated gentlemen in one of his essays. These gentlemen are parasites, they live in luxury on the wealth created by the poor, hard-working and emaciated peasantry of Bengal. These men are cowardly and weak. They talk but are very afraid of physical labour. They save money without any purpose, earn because they want to save, and learn

because they want to earn, and steal question papers because they want to learn. They work as clerks, teachers, lawyers, judges, doctors, etc, but whatever their profession be they oppress men and women they can lay their hands on.

The fact is that most of our writers came from this class. By and large, they saw the common man from a distance. They took pride in calling themselves liberals. Liberalism as a political philosophy belongs to the prosperous west, to countries where the extremes of poverty, ignorance and intolerance have been eliminated. But Bengal was submerged in poverty, ignorance and intolerance. Democracy, one of the corner-stones of liberalism, was never practised in this part of the world. Men were not free, their attitude was that of the cottagedweller and not of the participating citizen. The social order was feudal, the mental make-up even more so. Liberalism in an intolerant and undeveloped society is doomed to fail and also to act as a hindrance to the coming of a social revolution which has been so very necessary for this country. The talk of reforms in which the liberal writers indulged tended to make them oblivious of the truth that what was needed was a total transformation of the social system. The liberal writers claimed that there had been a renaissance in Bengal in the nineteenth century. What actually happened was that in the later half of the nineteenth century the effects of the contact between the west and the east had begun to show up. The renaissance in Italy had set men's minds free, it had produced the idea of political freedom as well; but the so-called Bengalee renaissance made the rule of the English go deeper, it gave the intelligentsia a feeling of intellectual well-being. Bondage looked liked freedom.

Bankimchandra was a typical product of the so-called renaissance. He felt the absence of freedom, but being a member of the newly created middle class and having been granted the privileges of a government servant he developed an ambivalence in his attitude towards the rulers. Moreover, there was the very real threat of being thrown out of employment in case the criticism of the British went beyond what was considered

to be permissible. He had himself said that the rulers were not happy with him for his writings. And a fellow writer, it may be mentioned here, had found that the promotion that was due to him did not come because a poem he had written was disliked by the authorities. In his very influential political novel *Anandamath* Bankim shows the patriots fighting the British. But in the end the spiritual leader of the patriots comes to tell them that it would be a mistake to continue to fight the British. For one thing, the British are far too powerful for the patriots to defeat. For another, the British are not the enemy, the enemy are the Muslims.

This failure on the part of so great a writer as Bankimchandra to identify the enemy caused a harm to the politics in the country to a degree which it would be difficult for the outsider to measure. In a country where the bulk of the population is illiterate and writing is about the only cultural activity carried on by the middle class, the writer as well as the written word enjoys a respect and authority not always commensurate with the artistic merits of either the writer or his work. Bankimchandra was apotheosised into a sage by the Hindus, and his political writings were accorded almost a religious significance and considered by the young terrorists of Bengal to be a perennial source of inspiration. To the Muslims he became a villain, and the burning of his books by them became in certain quarters a part of the movement for independence. Thus instead of bringing the two communities together in a much-needed bond of unity, Bankim's powerful literature served to create mutual hatred. It should also be noted here that the basic inspiration of the movement as depicted in *Anandamath* came from the worship of the country as a deity. This was unacceptable to the Muslims, who considered it sacrilege to worship any idols and took pride in what they called their anti-idolatry.

The fact that the Bankim's patriots were a semi-religious group and their leader a superman and a spiritual authority are significant. Hero-worship is almost endemic in the mind of Bengal, and is itself a product of the helplessness of man before nature. Nature

has not been tamed or conquered, so nature has to be offered homage, and the man who is bold, who can say that he has control over nature, earns the respect of his fellow human beings. The faith in the hero is nurtured by the lack of self-confidence that most men and women in this country suffer from. Feudalism rests on loyalty, and people in a feudal society tend to be very loyal to their heroes. From the hero to God is not as great a distance as it may seem. The hero becomes a messenger of God and is vested with superhuman powers. This is one of the important reasons why people in Bengal are religious. They call themselves spiritualists, but at bottom they are a helpless people invoking help from others and trying to placate forces which are beyond their control. Religious devotion has, therefore, flourished more than anything else. It has hindered the growth of science and of the scientific outlook, it has helped the forces of ignorance and bigotry and, above everything else, the flourishing of communalism.

To return to the point about the place of the common man in the literature of Bengal. It would be untrue to say that there has been no display of sympathy for the poor in our literature. Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the epic poet of Bengal, had portrayed in one of the two farces he wrote the life of the oppressed peasantry, and had also shown how the interests of the Hindus and the Muslims when they were poor were identical and how the common enemy was the landlord, who in the play happened to be a Hindu and pretended to be deeply religious to hide his lechery. Neither in his extractionist designs nor in the fulfilment of his illegitimate sexual desires, did this landlord make any discrimination between the Hindus and the Muslims. In Michael's play a Muslim tenant and a Hindu priest unite and punish the Hindu landlord. The picture of oppression is vivid, but more important than the picture is the attitude that he shows in it. Unfortunately Michael was an exception, as much in his writing as in his personal life, for he was a run-away person who had become a Christian and had taken a European wife. Rabindranath Tagore, the greatest of men Bengal ever produced, has written, particularly in his short stories, about the poor and lowly.

But there is even in him a distance from the common man—a distance not in any way typical of the landlords of whom he was one, but of the kind-hearted man who feels deeply for the poor and yet accepts, not without sadness and resignation, the oppression of the weak by the strong as an unfortunate fact of life. There has always been the rich and the poor which is the dispensation of history is the truth that seems to be emerging from his writings. He wrote out of pity and not in anger. What Bengal needed was a radical change, and Rabindranath was not prepared to lead his public in that respect. Leadership in a social movement need not come from a writer, but the fact remains that for his country Rabindranath was more than a poet, he was considered to be a hero, a leader, almost a prophet. Rabindranath has spoken of the necessity of change, but clothed in such language and couched in such symbolism as to render his ideas creations of imagination rather than principles and guidelines for actual work. Other writers were like him—not certainly in genius but very definitely in their outlook on life.

It is in this background that we must place Nazrul Islam.

Nazrul Islam is our first and, so far the only, major writer to come from the rural proletariat. Not that there were no poor writers before or after him. Saratchandra Chatterjee, the novelist, was very poor in his childhood and youth. Like Nazrul Islam, he too was denied the privilege of formal education. Yet temperamentally, and also in economic status, Saratchandra belonged to the semi-urban middle class, as did the other members of his family. His was the type of family that remains, despite economic hardship, intensely aware of its middle-class status and dreams that its younger members would be able to overcome the set-back and climb into the respectability of *bhadroloks*, becoming professional men. Saratchandra's *Sabyasachi* (the one who works equally well with both hands) is indeed a far cry from Bankimchandra's *babu*. For whereas the *babu* is a good-for-nothing social parasite, *Sabayasachi* is a revolution, if there was one, yet the difference between the two

gentlemen is more apparent than real. For *Sabyasachi* is as deeply conscious of his gentlemanliness as is the *babu*. This man is very bold, he is desperate, but his boldness and desperation are a product of the very liberalism which is the characteristic hall-mark of the Bengalee gentleman. Liberalism is unproductive of real change in the ruler-ruled relationship; and hence, seeing the failure of liberalism, members of the middle class, the younger brothers and cousins of the liberal gentlemen, turned, in protest not only against the rulers but also against their liberal relations, to terrorism. But terrorism and liberalism were both irrelevant to the life of the peasantry. The terrorists hated the British, the *babus* loved them; but love and hatred are related to each other, the real opposite of love is not hatred, it is indifference. *Sabyasachi* is as indifferent to the poor cultivators of Bengal as was the other member of his family, the *babu*. He is a staunch nationalist, but his nationalism seems to be co-extensive with his class. He does not mince words when he says, "Let the peasant be whatever he likes, let him prosper, but I do not expect any help from him". This gentleman is fighting for the freedom of his country and yet he does not expect any help from the peasants who constitute more than ninety per cent of the population. No, he will have nothing to do with the tillers of the land, because he is, although he does not admit it, afraid of the peasants. What he wants is a replacement of foreign rulers by the ones belonging to his own class. That is why he hates social revolutions. Says he to one of his admirers: "Why do you want a revolution within? Don't you see what our external enemies have done to us? Don't you see that the country is seething with discontent? The ties of affection and respect have broken down. Do you know why? It is because of you, you who are setting the educated against the educated". This revolutionary is a superman, but he is essentially a creation of the feudal mind that values the old ties above everything else in the world and wants to bow down in reverence before a hero. The man is as loudmouthed as the *babu*. He is as much preoccupied with the British as the *babu* is, and as much removed from the ordinary life in the

country as was his less admirable counterpart. The fact that the political novel in which Saratchandra created this hero *Pather Dabi* (the demand of the way) was second only to *Anandamath* in the influence it had on the terrorists is indicative of the class character of the terrorist movement. Saratchandra was a man of extraordinary pity, he bemoaned the lot of the cultivators, but he, like other writers of Bengal and like his own revolutionary hero, failed to identify himself with common man. Nor could he tell them of a way in which emancipation could be achieved.

Nazrul Islam was different. It is difficult to imagine him working as a clerk. Like Madhusudan he had also run away ; he had no settled life, all his life he remained a wayfarer, far away from the mental outlook of the liberal gentlemen. Madhusudan was born of well-to-do parents ; Nazrul Islam lost his father when he was very young, and when his mother married his uncle, he was for all practical purposes a parentless child. The warmth, the openness, the complete identification of himself with the common man are qualities that come from his social background and distinguish him from other writers in the language. Moreover, he knew the way in which emancipation could come—others did not know or did not say they knew. Like Whitman, who was one of the influences on him, Nazrul Islam was essentially a traveller along the open road.

The second fact that lent the writings of Nazrul Islam an added significance was his coming from a Muslim background. We have noted that the Muslims in Bengal were comparatively withdrawn from the places of importance in the economic and cultural life of the country. Muslim characters had not figured noticeably in Bengali writings. Michael contemplated writing on a Muslim theme, but he died before he could begin this work. Even Rabindranath did not include any Muslims among the large number of characters he created in a long creative life. Saratchandra's lone Gafur is of course a very memorable character, but he is a silent man, lost between two worlds, the one in his village and the one in the factory, and is not much more communicative than the ageing cow he loves so dearly. In the

1930s of the present century a group of young writers came to the fore and shook the intellectual devocotes by their bold and timely declaration of pity for the humble and hungry. But even in their writings the Muslim life remained unreflected. In fact East Bengal itself was unrepresented until Manik Bandopadhaya, a communist writer from East Bengal, wrote in the late thirties a novel on the life of the fishermen of the Padma. The occasional appearance of the countrified fool from East Bengal in the literature of the nineteenth century was meaningful inasmuch as it indicated the gulf that separated the rural Bengal from the smart cultural centre of Calcutta.

True, Muslims themselves made what could be called tentative attempts to create literature. But they suffered from a kind of nagging inferiority complex. Like a poor relation in a rich man's house, they were self-conscious, aware of themselves, and failed to achieve either the intellectual alertness or the emotional depth necessary for significant creation. They were, very often, like Kaikobad, the poet who lived in a poor house where there was little culture and less joy and bemoaned the loss of an empire that belonged neither to his country nor to his race. The Muslim middle class was worse off than the Hindu middle class, for it was not sure whether it could claim the Bengali language as its own.

With the coming of Nazrul Islam there occurred a dramatic change. His community was startled, for here was a poet who spoke boldly and unselfconsciously. He was louder than Mir Musharraf Hossain, his only rival in the field. He was able to go beyond Mosharraf Hossain, because he could write unapologetically in a language which the Bengali Muslims used in everyday conversation. At once, he performed several difficult tasks. First, he projected the Muslim mind into the Bengali language, enriching its literature with new sentiments. Secondly, by drawing freely on both Hindu and Muslim pantheons, and using words of Arabic and Persian origin he added to the strength and expressiveness of the Bengali language. Thirdly, he gave the Muslims a new sense of confidence and made them desirous of coming out of their places of withdrawal. The Muslim

middle class in Bengal was peculiarly puritanical ; he rehabilitated in their consciousness the joys of the arts. Finally, he helped to create a new understanding between the two communities in a manner no writer before him was able to do. He was non-communal, he had married a Hindu woman and was equally at home among the Muslims and the Hindus. And although the more direct impact of his arrival was felt by his own community, he belonged to Bengal as a whole.

This poet was significant from yet another point of view.

Nazrul Islam called himself a 'rebel', and declared that he would not cease to fight till all oppressions in the world had been put to an end. He made friends with the terrorists, young men and women who believed in armed struggle. He sang opening songs at political gatherings, addressed large conferences and travelled the length and breadth of Bengal inspiring people wherever he went. He brought out a bi-weekly that breathed and preached violence ; and as a result the British Government put him behind the prison bars, and kept him for about a year. The revolutionary books he wrote kindled a fire all over the country. Some of them the authorities promptly banned, but all of them enjoyed a wide, sometime clandestine, circulation. Angered, the Government again sentenced him to six months' imprisonment, and the poet would have gone inside a prison but for the signing of a pact between Gandhi and Irwin.

The country was greatly in need of a poet like him. His arrival synchronised with First World War which he had joined as a soldier. The war had brought India in contact with the outside world and had also encouraged India to hope for freedom. The war ended, but no satisfactory changes occurred in the constitutional set-up of India. The frustrated young men lost faith in constitutional movement. The only alternative left, the youth thought, was to terrorise the British into leaving India. Even before the war, in 1905, when Lord Curzon had proposed to partition Bengal, the Hindu middle class was embittered because it felt that the partition would separate East Bengal from Calcutta. Rabindranath

joined the anti-partition movement. The leaders of the Muslim community saw in the partition of Bengal a new prospect for the consolidation of their interests, they sat together and formed a political organisation called the Muslim League. It was at Dacca, the proposed capital of the new province, that the foundation meeting was held.

When, after the war, new pressure groups came into being within the Congress itself, the leadership had to yield in favour of the adoption of a programme of direct action. Gandhi called for peaceful non-cooperation with the British and boycott of British goods. His appeal evoked an unprecedented response. Burning of British goods, renouncing of titles, and boycott of English educational institutions took place throughout India. To add to the bitterness of the situation, the police, under orders from General O'Dyer, opened fire on an unarmed assemblage of people in a park in the town of Amritsar in the Punjab. The country began to seethe with anger, young men and women turned terrorists, shed the blood of the British officers as well as their own. They fired at officers wherever they could and at Chittagong they organised the famous raid on the armoury. Firings, arrests, protests, processions, and burning of newspapers became the order of the day.

Nazrul Islam was an embodiment, a hypostatization, of the new spirit that was abroad. His was a spirit of rebellion. He meets the Hegelian specifications of a hero, of one who was more than an artist or a politician, who was endowed with an "insight into what is timely as well as the courage to act decisively on the basis of his convictions". The Hegelian hero knows what his age demands.

So did Nazrul Islam, he represented the spirit of his times. He voiced the courage that the people admired in a hero and also the anger and resentment that was in the middle-class mind. He himself said, "I am a poet of the present, and not a prophet of the future". Yet he is different from a hero like Subhas Bose. For Subhas Bose, like the young terrorists and *Sabyasachi*, did not trust the common man; Nazrul Islam had reposed his confidence in the movement of the peasants

and workers. Like his friend and colleague, Comrade Muzaffar Ahmed, who was one of the builders of the Communist Party in India, he believed in the politics of the proletariat. And yet, it must be admitted, there were contradictions in him. He was rebellious and yet there is a persistent tendency in him to yield to devotionism; he wrote devotional songs and poems and, towards the end of his creative life, turned to occultism. This is also in keeping with a tradition. Mir Musharraf Hossain wrote on secular matters, but at the end took to writing on religious subjects. Nazrul Islam wrote for the terrorists as well as the communists, which is also a contradiction. The basic fact about him is, however, this that he was a poet of the open road, and he allowed all the trends and tendencies of his times to enter his mind and imagination. In a sense, he was a major writer not in spite of, but because of, the contradictions. The contradictions were not merely personal, they were of the age to which he belonged.

But, above everything, he was an artist. He knew how to establish the discipline of art over materials of passion and zeal, materials which are not particularly amenable to the artistic discipline. And it is because he was successful as a poet that he is important as a hero.

CHAPTER II

AMIDST THUNDER AND STORM

Nazrul Islam was born on May 24, 1899, in a village of Burdwan in West Bengal. Poor, uprooted from the family in early childhood, he lived like a nomad, roaming from one place to another, talking, singing, lecturing, and always writing. His arrival was sudden, his victory instantaneous. The life he lived was not unlike an unruly storm, or perhaps the month of May in Bengal, the month of thunder, lightning and storm.

After four of his elder brothers had died in infancy Nazrul was born. He continued to live, and his parents—Qazi Fakir Ahmed and Jaheda Khatun—gave him the nickname of *Dukhu*, which means the sorrowful. If one considers the experiences Nazrul had to pass through in his boyhood as well as manhood, one would feel that a more appropriate name would be difficult to find. He suffered as much as he sympathised with other sufferers.

Nazrul Islam's ancestors came from Patna in Bihar to settle in Burdwan. In the village they lived the Mughals had set up a court of justice and the family to which Nazrul was born had been its judges, whence the surname of Qazi, a judge. With the coming of the British the Qazis had lost their job together with the honour that goes with it. There was in the village the mausoleum of a saint of which Nazrul's father was the keeper. But Qazi Fakir Ahmed was not a well-to-do person; he was well-versed in Persian and Bengali, but not in the art of making a living. Moreover, he died when Nazrul was not more than eight years old. The family was not small, and as it so often happens in this part of the world, Fakir Ahmed was the only earning

member. Nazrul's nickname of the sorrowful promised to be appropriate.

He lived in a way any child of his circumstances would be expected to live, in poverty and without any particular promise of a happy future. For him chances of a proper schooling were sadly limited. He was, to add to this, like many a genius, a naughty child. Having lost his father at a very early age he was more free than other boys. There was none to curb his waywardness. The boy's main interests lay outside the school—in the folk tunes hummed by the cowherds and musical plays enacted by the village performers. To the touring parties of musical performers he felt irresistably drawn.

One of his uncles, Qazi Bazle Karim, was fond of poetry and would recite to his eager nephew verses from Persian. Bazle Karim also wrote poems in Bengali using a diction which was interpersed with Persian words. His uncles were instructors of the musical performers whom Nazrul loved. When he was only thirteen, Nazrul Islam joined one of the touring parties as a composer. His job was to prepare, orally, musical pieces which the members of the party would enact to the accompaniment of music and dance. And the boy made his mark in the job. There was rivalry between the parties and the one for which Nazrul Islam worked was particularly proud of their young prodigy who had earned for it the admiration of the audience. The composer's reputation travelled beyond his party and offers came to him from distant villages. Dictated as much by his temperament as by economic necessity, Nazrul continued in the work for some time and composed quite a few musical plays. He had a rich voice and considerable acting talents, and before long began to appear on the stage. Even earlier than this the boy had worked as a preacher in the village mosque and as tutor in a primary school, but it was as a composer-performer that he showed his talent. Keen and curious, he enjoyed his journeys with his party to different villages. Meanwhile Nazrul Islam had developed a habit of reading and he read everything he could lay his hands on.

The future of the poet was foreshadowed in the way he spent his boyhood. Like his maturer years, his days in boyhood were but a series of adventures. After he had left the job of the composer-performer, Nazrul entered a high school. Soon after he fled from his home. For a while he worked with a railway guard as his cook. But Nazrul could not stay with him for long. Again he fled, this time to Assansol, and found for himself a petty job in a bakery. The wage was a rupee a month. A police inspector happened to hear him play on a musical instrument, took a fancy for him and brought him to his home in Mymensingh in what is now Bangladesh. The kindly police officer admitted the boy to a school where he won a free studentship.

He was absent-minded and irregular in his studies; yet he impressed his teachers by his intelligence. The school was at a distance from the house he lived in and every day the young student had to walk about five miles back and forth. The path wended through fields and marshy lands and he had chosen a solitary corner under a tree where he would stop to play on a flute. He did not stay in the school for long, though; before the year had ended the boy was in Raniganj in West Bengal. The local school granted him a free studentship together with free food and boarding; a kind-hearted person gave him an allowance of rupees seven a month.

Now he was free from his financial worries. Now he could live on his own, entertain friends and even send a small amount to his younger brother. A friendly teacher taught him Persian and Sailojananda Mukerjee, a fellow student, encouraged him to write. With Sailojananda young Nazrul spent many a happy hour reading and talking literature. Sailojananda, in his later life, became a successful novelist and script-writer for films. He has published a memoir recollecting the happy days he had spent with Nazrul Islam. The two friends shared a common love of writing. They were also alike in their love of adventure and in 1917 when Nazrul Islam was a student of class X they decided to join the army.

The War was going on in full fury and recruitment centres had been set up in the cities. The two friends fled to Calcutta. Sailoananda failed to be enlisted, Nazrul Islam, who was of a stronger build and had been a sportsman, was accepted by the 49th Bengali Regiment. He was posted at the Army Barracks of Karachi where he went from Calcutta via Lahore and Nowshera. He joined the army as a sepoy but was soon promoted to the post of a Battalion Quartermaster-Havildar, in charge of the stores.

This gave him new experience and added a new chapter to his life. He served in the army between 1917 and 1919. The prose he wrote at the beginning of his career as a writer records the impression the life in the barracks made on the sensitive young man's mind. But, contrary to popular belief, Nazrul never travelled beyond Karachi. Life in the barracks was, naturally, rigorous and any leisure that Nazrul could snatch he used in receiving further lessons in Persian from a Punjabi who was well-versed in the language. With his help the smart Havildar translated into Bengali the Rubaiyats of Omar-Khayyam and the Ghazals of Hafiz. In his later life he drew upon his knowledge of Persian, and wrote some of his poems and songs imitating Persian verse-forms.

During his career as a soldier he wrote several short stories later collected in a book called *Rikter Vedan* (the Sorrows of the Distitute). Concurrently, he wrote poems and songs. From Karachi Nazrul Islam used to send these to a Calcutta journal, the *Saogat* (Gift), which was then serving young Muslim writers as an organ. He signed his name as Havildar Qazi Nazrul Islam and created a furore with the distinctive marks of originality that every piece of his writing proudly displayed. At the beginning, he published more prose than poetry and was known as more of a prose writer than a poet. His prose writing of the volume *Vayther Daan* (the Gift of Sorrow) also started coming out in other journals. Nazrul's ideas were new, his style startling, and sincerity captivating.

In January 1920 Nazrul came home on leave. He stopped in Calcutta and met the members of an orga-

nisation that called itself the Bengali Muslim Literary Society. Soon he pledged himself to the promotion of Muslim writings in Bengali. With the young enthusiasts of the Society Nazrul spent some very happy days and decided to join them after the disbandment of the Bengali Regiment. When the Regiment was disbanded in April the same year, he went back to his village, met the District Magistrate of Burdwan and left with him an application for the post of a sub-registrar. But finally, at the instance of his friends in Calcutta, he made up his mind to be a full-time writer rather than a government servant. This decision was no less important in his career as a writer than the earlier one to join the army and was a decisive step taken towards the fulfilment of the promise he had hitherto shown.

With his friends in Calcutta Nazrul lived a life that was full of work, zest and zeal. He sang in not a very melodious but a very appealing voice, talked with a gusto and wrote at an unusual speed. To his friends he was a perpetual source of inspiration. Many of these friends were talented persons and made good use of the inspiration Nazrul gave them. One of them, Mr. Abul Mansur Ahmed, was a writer and political worker, and became, after the partition of Bengal in 1947, a member of the Cabinet of the Government. Another, Mr. Habibullah Bahar, worked as a Provincial Minister. Mr. Bahar's sister, Mrs. Shamsunnahar Mahmood, on whom Nazrul wrote a poem, was, when she died in 1964, an eminent social worker. Comrade Muzaffar Ahmed was more than a friend to Nazrul Islam. He was older in years than Nazrul Islam and was responsible for introducing the poet to the politics of peasants and workers. Quite a few of these friends, including Comrade Muzaffar Ahmed, have published in recent years lively accounts of their days with Nazrul Islam, recreating for us pictures of the life and times of the poet. To them he was more than a dear person, he was a living institution and a perennial source of inspiration.

A.K. Fazlul Huq, "the tiger of Bengal", who was a Chief Minister of undivided Bengal and a Governor of what used to be East Pakistan, started in 1920 a daily called the *Nava Yug* (New Age). Nazrul Islam and

Muzaffar Ahmed were given the editorial responsibility. In writing editorials for the daily as well as sub-editing and framing headlines Nazrul Islam displayed an originality hardly paralleled in Bengali journalism. Some of his editorials have been published in the form of a book and are excellent examples of journalism that endures. The *Nava Yug* did not live long, but it made history. Its style was new ; and, what is more, it was the first newspaper in Bengal, perhaps in the whole of India, to project the neglected cause of the peasants and workers.

Meanwhile, the struggle for independence was gaining momentum and the non-cooperation movement evoked an unprecedented and unanticipated response among the public. Nazrul Islam cast himself into the upsurge: he wrote, sang, lectured and toured the districts. It was during one of his sojourns in East Bengal that he married. But on the very night of his wedding he left for Comilla where he met Pramila Sengupta whom he married in 1924. The second marriage proved to be a happy one and the couple lived together in joys and sorrows till the death of Pramila in 1924 after prolonged ailment.

In 1921 he published his most widely known poem *Vidrohi* (the rebel). Seldom has a single poem earned its author such reputation as this poem—daringly new in sentiments and style as it was—did in the early twenties of this century. At twenty-two the poet found his fame established once and for all in every quarter and area of the country. The late Mohitlal Majumdar, a kind of Dr. Johnson in Bengali literature and an unsparing critic of the young writers, had earlier written patronisingly on Nazrul, but now that Nazrul posed a threat to the settled order in literature, Mohitlal turned against him and came out with the claim that Nazrul Islam had borrowed the theme of the poem from an essay he had read to the poet. Although the claim is flimsy, and need not be taken seriously, yet it serves to illustrate the jealousy Nazrul Islam had roused among the established writers in literature, proving it beyond any doubt that a new and major writer had arrived. The

notorious literacy weekly *Shanibarar Chiti* (the Saturday Letter) parodied the poem in a verse called the frog.

Nazrul founded in 1922 a bi-weekly styled as the *Dhumketu* (the Comet). Rabindranath Tagore, then at the pinnacle of his glory, sent a message of welcome which appeared in the first issue, and later Saratchandra Chatterjee, the novelist, wrote a letter congratulating the paper on its courage in choosing to follow the path of right and justice.

The *Dhumketu* was virtually the literary counterpart of the terrorist movement in Bengal and it did not take time to acquire an unrivalled vogue. Naturally, the police were concerned. They pounced on its editor, accused him of sedition and produced him in the court of the Chief Presidency Magistrate, Mr. Swinhoe. Nazrul's statement before the Magistrate, itself a piece of literature, produced a sensation. The public was impressed, but not the British Magistrate, who found the poet guilty and sentenced him to a year's rigorous imprisonment. He was taken first to the Alipore Central Jail in Calcutta and from there to the Hooghly Jail. As usual, he made his stay in the Hooghly Jail memorable to its prisoners, particularly those who were punished like him on charges of sedition, with the songs he composed and sang. But the jail authorities were insensitive, such authorities always are. They would not allow him to receive newspapers or writing materials from outside. Nazrul composed a comic song on the British jailor and sang it in chorus. That served only to incense the officer. Angered, the poet decided to go on a hunger strike. Despite strict censorship, this news went round and created a great anxiety in all parts of the country. Rabindranath sent the striking poet a telegram which was never delivered to Nazrul Islam. Saratchandra went to meet the poet, as did the poet's mother. Still the hunger strike continued. The anxious citizens of Calcutta organised a public meeting addressed, among others, by C. R. Das, one of the greatest leaders that India had during its struggle for independence. The meeting requested the poet to give up hunger strike. The persuasions went on, till at length, on the 39th day, Nazrul Islam agreed to eat but not without

making the jail authorities promise more civilized behaviour with the prisoners. Nazrul Islam was in prison when Rabindranath dedicated to him one of his plays.

After the strike, Nazrul was transferred from Hooghly to Bahrapore. He was released, finally, on December 15, 1923. The welcome he received from the country at large was tremendous.

Nazrul Islam's first book of poems *Agni Vina* (the Burning Lute) came out while he was still in jail. The cover design was by Abanindranath Tagore, an artist of fame. Within months the first edition was sold out. About two years later, in 1924, the year he married Pramila, *Visher Vanshi* (the Poison Flute) was published. The book was proscribed by the government; but it was hawked and sold all around Bengal by political workers.

Poverty Nazrul had known very intimately. In those days poetry did not pay much; it does not even now. A well-established prestigious journal used to pay him at the rate of five rupees for a poem. The only other poet who got paid was Rabindranath Tagore. Nazrul, however, was never a thrifty man. As much in literature as in life, he was a prodigal in habits. After his marriage he stayed for some time at Hooghly where his first son was born. The child did not live more than a few months. Soon after his son's death Nazrul moved to Calcutta.

By then the leftist sections within the Congress had organised themselves into the Labour Swaraj (Independence) party. They decided to bring a weekly organ called the *Langal* (the Plough). Nazrul Islam was invited to be the editor. He accepted the job and wrote for it some topical poems and editorials.

But there was a vagrant in him and the boy who fled away from his home in the early teens could not live a domesticated life even in his mature years. After a time he left Calcutta to go to Krishnanagar. But he liked literature, and wrote wherever he went. The most significant work he produced out of his experiences at Krishnanagar was a novel entitled *Mrityu Khudha* (the Hunger of Death).

Nazrul Islam had been to Dacca several times. His first visit was made in 1927. Young writers and teachers of Dacca University had formed a literary organisation, the Muslim Literary Society. The Society ran a journal called the *Shikha* (Flame). In 1927 Nazrul inaugurated the first annual conference of the organisation. He came again, the very next year, to attend the second annual conference. He had been to Chittagong in 1926. From Chittagong he went to the coastal island of Sandwip. Sylhet, then a part of Assam, Nazrul Islam visited in 1928 as the chief guest to the Surma Valley Students' Conference.

The *Langal* was transformed into the *Gana Vani* (the voice of the people) in 1926. Nazrul left the editorial job, but continued to write for it. His second son was born in 1926; and Nazrul named his first anthology of *Ghazals* as *Bulbul*, after his son's name.

In 1929 the poet was accorded a civic reception in Calcutta. The celebration was presided over by Prafulla Chandra Roy, the great Bengali chemist. Among others, Subhas Chandra Bose, founder of the Forward Block and later of the INA, spoke on the occasion. By then Nazrul Islam had settled in Calcutta. His first dwelling in the city was very humble, comprising two rooms on the ground floor of the office of the *Saogat*, the journal that had launched him. During this stay in Calcutta Nazrul devoted himself, primarily, to the composition of songs. He could write songs on all types of subjects and in all kinds of forms. And the rapidity with which he wrote was astonishing. He was, moreover, fortunate in having for his exponents singers like Abbasuddin Ahmed and K. Mallick. His songs were a tremendous success being as original as they were appealing. "His Master's voice" was the first gramophone company to record his songs. Being afraid of incurring the displeasure of the police, the company did not, at first, want to publish his name. Later they showed more courage and admitted the authorship. "Magaphone" and "Hindusthan Record Company" followed suit. Nazrul himself sang and, when Rabindranath died, recited a poem on gramophone records. For the recording companies he worked in the triple capacity of a poet,

composer, and conductor. All-India Radio secured his services and appointed him as one of their music directors. He was also given the responsibility of music direction by a couple of film companies for their productions. At this period Nazrul also wrote plays and even appeared on the stage.

His mother died in 1928, in the same month as Nazrul Islam was born. In 1930 came another shock—his son Bulbul died. The poet was deeply distressed and in reaction he took to occultism. He visited spiritualists—at times fake ones—and sought consolation from them. But still he had the fire within him burning, and not smouldering. Even during a period of acute mental agony he published two collections, *Chandavindu* (the Nasal Mark) and *Proloysikha* (the Flame of Destruction). The books were promptly banned, the author prosecuted and awarded six months' rigorous imprisonment. The sentence could not, however, be carried out owing to a pact signed by Gandhi and Irwin under which the Government had promised clemency.

When A. K. Fazlul Huq revived his daily in 1935, Nazrul Islam was again made the Chief Editor. The next year he gave an address to the Faridpur District Muslim Students' Conference in which Nazrul made this significant statement, "I have retired from my service to literature, to the nation and the country. Self-exiled, I am now living in the island of music".

The rigours of poverty grew harder and harder. Even the record shop he had set up was auctioned. To add to his plight, his wife had an attack of paralysis in 1940. She remained confined to bed till her death in 1940. The Muslim Literary Society, the organisation that had received him when he first came to Calcutta, observed his 43rd anniversary on May 25, 1941, at the Calcutta Dental College premises. On the tenth of August the following year he was taken ill. Friends and relations sent him to the Mental Hospital at Ranchi, but the disease could not be cured. Eleven years later a fund was again raised to send him to Europe for expert treatment. He went to Europe, was examined by brain specialists in London and Vienna, but the disease, they said, had gone beyond recovery.

So the man who has been most eloquent and articulate among his contemporaries now lies mute, unable to speak or move. But his life he has lived fully and heroically, a life that was like nature in Bengal in the month of May or, perhaps, more like a play which had many episodes, but still had, as all good plays are required to have, an abiding unity of action and a noble unity of purpose.

CHAPTER III

NOBLER THAN HIS WORKS

As a man Nazrul Islam was even nobler than all his achievements. Generous and open-hearted, he made friends without number in the country. Buddhadeva Bose, the poet and critic, wrote about him :

To meet him has been to love him, for his is one of the most picturesque and attractive personalities in our recent history. One of Nature's own bohemians, he has passed his life in a manner enchanting to his friends and embarrassing to his family. Where he was, there was delight, and he was seldom at home. Not good at conversation he made up the deficiency with laughter and gesture and, of course, songs. A good voice was not one of his endowments, but the joy, the tireless joy he brought to the singing of his own songs, kept his audience for hours, and for hours he could and would sing, aided by tea, by pan, and a harmonium. A shocking spendthrift, utterly reckless in business transactions, never caring for the morrow, he lavished his life-force on others, perhaps impoverishing himself... A vagrant, he has been a soldier and a prisoner ; he has been poor and rich, he has shouted himself hoarse in Calcutta foot-ball matches and spent silent hours over the chess-board ; he had once started a gramophone shop (pre-destined to liquidation) and even acted in a play and a film ; he has been loved by every notable contemporary, and numerous unnotables ; he has been a living denial of everything that withers the heart ; his name has been a synonym for charm. And life casts him off before his fiftieth year, for his afflic-

tion, which has nothing in it of the frenzy of Lear or Blake, is feared to be as unmitigable as his wife's paralytic chairs are relentless.

Another well-known contemporary writer, Achintya Kumar Sengupta, had this to say about Nazrul :

As in his writings, so also in his clothes, he had a colourful anarchy about him. In his arrogance there was the depth of a poem—an overwhelming, colourful poem. He would put on a yellow shirt and a scarlet mantle, or *vice versa*... He would declare that what he wanted was not to look distinguished but to distract others. But was it necessary for him to put on loud clothes to distract people ?

Not in the least. Nazrul did not need any impudence of clothes. Even in a big crowd he would be known—so abundant was his vitality, boundless his energy. He was always ready to burst out into a thunderous laughter. His eyes were big, his countenance had the calm sublimity of a powerful character. Even from afar he would remind you of the eternal man in him. Colourful Nazrul had been in his clothes, but more in his conversation, laughter and songs.

Kazi Abdul Wadud, an eminent educationist and critic, records an incident that occurred in Dacca during one of the poet's visits to the town :

About twenty years ago some notable Khan Bahadurs (persons given decorations by the Government) of Dacca arranged a meeting with Nazrul Islam on a house-boat on the river Buri Ganga. The Khan Bahadurs gathered there in due time, but the poet was conspicuous by his absence. He was found, after a good deal of search, to be spending his time in the company of a friend—his boisterous laughter must have divulged his whereabouts. When he was reminded in a tone of subdued complaint that the revered Khan Bahadurs had been waiting for him for a long time, he said : 'I am the poet of the land—what else have the Khan Bahadurs to do except wait for me patiently ? The Khan

Bahadurs and Rai Bahadurs of the land will line the street I shall pass through, will bow to me while I proceed accepting their salaams (salutes) —this is what may be called the true relationship between us'.—The historic example of such a sense of glory of the self in a penniless artist is furnished by Beethoven. But we know of no poverty-stricken artist in our country except Nazrul Islam to have expressed himself in such a strain. The poet once remarked, 'I bow to none except myself'—and the utterance was no stray outburst but the expression of an abiding feeling in him—it is in fact his dominant feeling.

In an inferior writer this would have been intolerable, but in Nazrul Islam the pride was not unbecoming; on the contrary, it added to the charm of his character. Nazrul wrote letters—quite lengthy ones—to friends and admirers, and particularly to young writers all over the country, giving them inspiration and encouragement. Begum Sufia Kamal, one of our leading poets, recalls with pride how she had, quite unexpectedly, received a letter from Nazrul. Nazrul Islam was then at the height of his popularity and Sufia Kamal only a young girl living in a village.

He drank tea perhaps more than he ate food and could always snatch some time to play chess—and that for hours together at a time. Sitting among friends, amidst laughter and noise, he would, all of a sudden, turn grave and write a poem with the absorption of an artist. Nazrul Islam did not have a fixed income; he could not stick to a job for long. He spent more than he earned and was, usually, unable to stave off poverty, but he was never stingy or mean.

CHAPTER IV

THE BLAZING COMET

Nazrul Islam called himself the poet of rebellion. This name he richly deserved. While it is true that in some respect he is like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, who lived and wrote in the late nineteenth century and was defiantly rebellious, Nazrul Islam is different even from Michael because of his nearness to the poor and the oppressed. One of the symbols that he used in his most widely known and justly famous poem called *Vidrohi* (the Rebel), whence the appellation of the rebel poet, was that of a comet blazing its trail and portending evil for the world. Later, when he founded a bi-weekly, he called it the *Dhumketu* (the Comet), Rabindranath Tagore sent it a message which read :

To Qazi Nazrul Islam.
Come, ye comet,
Come to build a bridge of fire across the dark,
Hoist up on the castletop of evil days
Your flag of victory !
Let omens be carved on the forehead of the night,
Awaken, startle those that drowse.

This tribute Nazrul Islam richly deserved. His career has been one of peculiar restlessness: his arrival in the literature of Bengal quite sudden and surprising. He conquered as he came. In a creative life of only twenty-three years between the two World Wars, Nazrul Islam covered an area of remarkable width and variety. He is acknowledged as the poet of revolt. But he also wrote with equal facility on nature and love. Nazrul Islam's depiction of the world of children is no less satisfactory than his treatment of the theme of violence. He wrote satires and devotional poems, celebrated

heroism as well as sentimentalism. Like Blake, he was a self-taught man and did not have any formal education, and like Blake again, he stands outside the regular line of literary succession. He was not anticipated by any immediate predecessor. As much unlike his predecessors as his contemporaries, he is an exception, and remains, and will continue to remain, a surprise to all. His critics were indeed right in pointing out that the poet did not show any capacity to grow. But it must be pointed out that even his early writings do not display signs of immaturity. He unites in him the simplicity of a child with the intelligence of a mature man. In the best of his poems Dionysus and Apollo wrestle, without upsetting the necessary balance. Restlessness and impatience constitute his characteristic weaknesses ; but they are also his peculiar strength. For they enabled him to write with exceptional rapidity on an astonishing variety of subjects. His likening of himself to the comet was not a chance discovery, it was a very truthful description of his nature as a poet.

Good poetry, it has been said, is dramatic in nature, having a life of its own and being capable of inducing the reader to suspend his disbelief, to use Coleridge's word, and surrender himself to the life of the poem. A poem that fails in this fails as poetry. One of the striking features of Nazrul Islam's poetry is its dramatic quality. There are attributes that his poetry lacks ; he is not, for one thing, always restrained and is, at times, even chaotic ; he is not, for another, deep in thought-content ; but he is always dramatic, sometimes, perhaps, dramatic to a fault. And consequently, he does unfailingly attract and absorb the attention of his readers and, like all genuine poets, communicate even before he is understood.

But we must qualify the observation. Nazrul Islam was not, because he could not be, dramatic in the sense that a poet like Browning is dramatic. For he was not an objective writer. On the contrary, Nazrul was egotistical, always full of himself, though without the sublimity of a Milton or a Wordsworth. He wrote a few plays but like the plays by the poets of the English Romantic Revival they do not show any great skill either

in characterisation or construction. Still, even the most casual of his readers cannot miss in his poetry the presence and working of an active mind that goes on creating continually new and living entities. Like his mind, all his poems, even the shortest of them, hum with life.

When he writes on nature and love, the poet is comparatively quieter, but is not without the liveliness that comes from a sensibility which is always responsive to every thing around it. Nazrul Islam's imagination is both visual and auditory, and the agreeable music of his verse promises the readers a world not always of verisimilitude, but certainly of romance and magic. Coleridge has noted that the purpose of metre in poetry is "to increase the vivacity and susceptibility of both of the general feelings and of the attention", and Rabindranath has observed that poetry is distinguished from prose by its having a metre which imparts to it a vivacity prose can never achieve. In the management of his metre, Nazrul Islam was a virtuoso. With a skill that reminds one of Swinburne—between these two poets there are other points of similarity as well—he used his rhyme and rhythm. Words in Nazrul Islam's poetry do not merely convey a meaning, they sing and, if the metaphor is permissible, even dance and create a very colourful world of action and movement. After he had read one of Nazrul's early poems called *Kheyaparar Tarani* (the Ferry Boat), Mohitlal Majumdar wrote, "Nazrul's verse is an irrepressible manifestation of the spontaneous flow of surging ideas. Although only one metre has been used in his poem, *Kheyaparar Tarani*, still by the shifting of the pause he has been able to create a rhythm appropriate to the flow of his ideas; he has maintained regularity of metre without sacrificing the spontaneity, freedom and flow of his ideas. In fact the metre seems to be an ungrudging servant to his ideas, always obedient and never immodest. It is particularly this quality of the genuine poet in Nazrul Islam which earns our admiration. As you recite this particular poem you realize that neither the meaning nor the diction has been forced. Wonder, fear, respect, courage, unwavering faith and above all a very sombre imagination of the supernatural

show themselves through his juxtaposition of words and metre". He is, therefore, dramatic in a special sense.

This dramatic virtue of his poetry draws directly upon the life he lived. Conflict lies at the heart of drama, and Nazrul Islam's life is an impressive record of a ceaseless struggle against the oppression and cruelty, the cowardic, meanness and selfishness he had seen and encountered. His was the voice of a protagonist raised in revolt against all that was evil. The resentment he felt went right into the making of his poetic self.

On a more personal level, he had to fight yet another and more exacting war against poverty. Literature did not bring him as much money as it brought fame. The sense of security that arises out of having a settled profession or an assured income was denied to him. He did not have a profession, and was the first poet to make writing his career. His society and his times were also in turmoil. His restlessness and impatience are more than temperamental, although temperamental they certainly were.

In his poems of revolt he shows, not unlike Shelley, a particular love for the mobile and changing aspects of nature. In them Nazrul Islam found symbols for his own state of mind. Yet, unlike Shelley, he lacked the support of an organised philosophical system. Nazrul Islam was not incapable of contradicting himself. He would now write in celebration of the peaceful non-co-operation movement and then, perhaps the next year, decide that freedom could be won only through armed uprising. He has to his credit poems on Marxism as well as on spiritualism. But through all these varying moods and apparent contradictions there runs an underlying and abiding unity provided by a love or strength and power. He compared himself with great heroes as well as villains in history, because in both he saw manifestation of the principle of strength and vigour. Nazrul Islam's reverence for vigour made him its votary ; but it did something more, it prevented him from reaching a philosophical height. Critics have accused him, not without justice, of a propensity to repeat himself. Like Kipling he is loud. These are limitations indeed ; and

an inferior poet would have sunk under them, but Nazrul Islam did not; he was strong enough to carry them along and write enduring poetry in spite of them. It is not difficult to find fault with his poetry but it is impossible not to be moved by his writings.

Nazrul Islam was not unaware of his weaknesses. But he was not apologetic and said in his verse :

“I am a poet of the present, and not a prophet of the future !”

“At the turn of the century I may survive, I may not—but I should not care”.

“I have turned mad having seen what I have seen, having heard what I have heard. Therefore, I say whatever occurs to me”.

Unqualified statements like these indicate that he had an enormous amount of self-confidence and conviction in the justness of his cause. Nazrul Islam was a committed writer. What he said in his deposition before the British magistrate who was trying him on charge of sedition has no parallel in the history of Bengali literature. In translation, a part of the statement reads as follows :

I have been accused of sedition. That is why I am now confined in the prison.

On the one side is the Crown, on the other the flames of the Comet.

One is the king, sceptre in hand ; the other Truth with the mace of justice. To plead for me, the king of all kings, the judge of all judges, the eternal truth—the living God.

My judge is employed by none. Before this great judge the king and the subject, the rich and the poor, the happy and the sad are alike and equal. Before his throne the crown of the king and the string of the beggar have equal places of honour. His laws are Justice and Religion. These were not manufactured by any victor to rule over the vanquished. His laws emerged out of the realisation of a universal truth about mankind. They are for and by a sovereign God. The king is supported by an infinitesimal creature ; I by its eternal and indivisible Creator. I am a poet ; I

have been sent by God to express the unexpressed, to portray the unportrayed. It is God who is heard through the voice of the poet. My voice is but a medium for Truth, the message of God. To legal sophistry that message may appear to be mere sedition, but to Justice it is neither unjust nor untrue. The king can muzzle that voice, but to Religion and Justice it will always remain the innocent, immaculate, undimmed and ever-burning Truth.

Truth is self-evident. It cannot be destroyed by any angry-eyed sceptre. I am the instrument of that eternal self-evident truth, an instrument that voices forth the message of the ever-true. I am an instrument of God. The instrument is not unbreakable, but who is there to break God? It is undeniable that Truth exists, that there is God—has always been and shall always be. He who has gagged the voice of God to-day and is trying to silence it for ever is but a very small particle created by Him. That it exists to-day is because He has willed so; if He should not want it to stay it will disappear tomorrow. Only the ignorant can afford to be vain. The created is now trying to punish the Creator. But such vanity is foredoomed to be drowned in tears...

The sincerity and conviction with which he speaks in the deposition has a frightening intensity that reminds one of the courage of conviction that the terrorists of Bengal displayed.

It is when we remember that he came of a community where fear and timidity, despair and resignation had become endemic and life was characterised by an unquestioning acceptance of, and a blind obedience to, the social conventions that we can realize the proper significance of this courage. For one who knew no security in life and had to struggle hard for bare existence it is not easy to be bold and optimistic, avoiding fear and timidity. But Nazrul Islam did not turn escapist; he remained, till the last moments of his creative life, an optimist. He kindled the flames of a hope that not only inspired confidence among his country-men but did also,

in a great measure, help dispel the gloom of darkness. In his optimism also he resembled the terrorists whose hope came from the firm conviction that the evil system they were fighting was inherently weak, that it will collapse once it is challenged with courage. His optimism meant much for his readers. Because hope is a weapon in the hands of the oppressed, for those who must fight for a change. The proletariat cannot afford to be callous, cynical or pessimistic. Nor could Nazrul Islam; for he was their own poet. Since time immemorial Bengal has been a land of heart-rending cries; Nazrul Islam raised a voice that did not cry in misery, although misery he had seen and known in plenty. He shouted defiance and declared a total war against the forces of tyranny. The millennium was not far off, Nazrul Islam assured his audience. And what he said carried entire conviction. For what he said was said with unalloyed sincerity.

His revolt, it is important to remember, was aimed not only against the foreign rulers but against oppression of all kinds—social, economic and political. Nazrul Islam was not a nationalist, although he knew that national liberation was the first step towards the liberation of the masses from social and economic oppression. His outlook was international, and it was no accident that it was he who rendered the *Internationale* into Bengali. Nazrul Islam knew that the exploitation that the British were carrying out was imperialist in character, and that the oppressed people all over the world must unite to overthrow the forces of imperialism. Thus in 1926 he wrote one of his very well-known poems in support of the striking workers of England, knowing that the cause of the workers was the same everywhere. This awareness was a completely new element in Bengali literature. Two great events had taken place in the world before Nazrul Islam came to literature: the First World War and the Russian Revolution. The War found its echoes in Bengali poetry, but the revolution did not. There were political workers who were acquainted with the writings of Marx and with the achievement of Lenin: there were political thinkers who wrote about the Russian Revolution; but it was left to Nazrul Islam to introduce the message of the international communist

movement into the hitherto-closed house of Bengali poetry. As a young man of twenty he had read about the Revolution and the Red Army, and was very deeply stirred. In an early poem called *Prolayullash* (the joy in devastation) he spoke of the coming of the Russian Revolution. Later he wrote a whole group of poems called the *Samyavadi* (one who believes in Communism). But Nazrul Islam's writings on communist themes are of more than historical value, for as poetry also they are excellent. Nazrul Islam preached direct action and did not believe in the politics of petition and appeal. Beggining, he said, was an evil. To be sent to jail for writing poems was completely new in the Bengali literary life. This is not to say that thought was ever free in India under the British. As early as 1835 Rammohan Roy had demanded that freedom of the press should not be denied. Despite his calling the English a friend, Bankimchandra did not go altogether uncensured by the rulers. He had complained that his novel *Anandamath* had angered the English. It is also known that the staging of one of his writings was banned and that the portrayal of an indigo-planting Englishman was not liked by the government. Father Long, a missionary, was sentenced to imprisonment for publishing an English translation done by Michael Madhusudan of a play on the life and style of the English indigo-planters in Bengal. But Nazrul Islam was the first Bengali writer to be sent to jail for writing poetry. Later many other writers were put behind prison bars—but for their political as distinguished from literary activities. In Nazrul Islam politics and literature were made inseparable. He not only changed our idea of poetry, but our idea of a poet as well. He had many followers: he had friends and admirers who imitated his dress, his language, his rhetoric. But none of his imitators could write his poetry, because the real Nazrul Islam could not be found in his dress, language or rhetoric, the real Nazrul Islam lay hidden in his wide-awake awareness of what was happening in the world around him, and in his inordinate zest for life. He did not have much formal education, but few Bengalees were more educated than he. Whereas others had only intellectual education, his education was both

emotional and intellectual. An uneducated man could not have created the literature Nazrul created. This poet was an unusually gifted man : he had abundance, variety and competence, reinforced by his ability to receive education.

In his short stories Rabindranath Tagore made excellent use of the experiences he had gathered during his visits to the villages in his estate. But his preoccupation was mainly with the lower middle class. His novels, on the other hand, deal almost exclusively with the well-to-do. The problem with Rabindranath lay in this that he did not have any first-hand knowledge about the life of peasants and workers who constituted, and still does, the vast majority of the population. He could see them only from a distance and as an outsider, as if they were an object of nature, or perhaps a picture in a frame.

We have mentioned in the first chapter the case of Saratchandra Chatterjee, the novelist. Saratchandra was a contemporary of Nazrul Islam. He was a man of great pity, he decried social evils, particularly the inhuman treatment of women. But even he did not have many tillers of the land in his fiction. What is even more disappointing is the novelist's rejection of the idea of social revolution. *Pather Dabi* preached the message of armed struggle against the English. It was proscribed by the government, but it used to be sold by political workers sometimes at a price of rupees one hundred a copy. Hand-written copies were also made and circulated. In this influential novel, the hero, who is compounded of the real-life characters of Subhas Bose and M. N. Roy with a chemical of imagination thrown in, argues with a poet, who, knowledgeable persons say, is modelled after Nazrul Islam, about the reason why the revolution must leave out the unlettered and ordinary peasants. The educated section of the community, he believes, is the most humiliated class. Secondly, it is the educated youth who can make sacrifice for an idea. Elsewhere, Saratchandra has spoken against the preachers of social revolution. Rabindranath's political novel *Char Addhay* (Four Chapters) showed how the terrorist movement was a wastage and a failure. He made the

vulgar error of thinking that it was owing to personal and private frustrations that young men and women turned terrorists. In the other novel, *Gharey Vairey* (The Home and the World), he shows his lack of sympathy for the political agitators. Before Nazrul Islam, literature did not have much to do with the underdogs. Towards the end of his life Rabindranath wrote poems lamenting his inability to be a participant in the life of the peasants. He said he had sometimes gone to them but only as a visitor and is still awaiting the message of a poet who would be a partaker of the life of the agricultural labourers, the poet who would be a relation of peasants in both words and action. Nazrul Islam answers the description. He writes as an insider. One of the factors that made this identification possible was, of course, the fact of his coming of a poor family.

This is a point that needs further stressing. Nazrul Islam was born of poor parents, his father died when he was eight, his mother married for a second time. As a child he had never known the warmth and security of the family. He is the only notable writer in the Bengali language who came from the proletariat and wrote on its behalf. Many of the qualities in him, such as his warmth, camaraderie, openness of heart, breadth of vision, loudness of voice, and his ungrudging acceptance of the reality of life, he owes, to a considerable extent, to his social background. He never acquired the middle-class vices of narrowness, suspicion and wordly ambition. His social disadvantage proved to be his virtue.

Nazrul Islam had an able successor in the Marxist poet, Sukanta, who died young but has left some very good and popular poems. Sukanta's politics was clearer, he had the advantage of coming after Nazrul Islam and of writing in the 1940s by which time the communist movement in India had been able to establish itself. But Sukanta's voice was less powerful than Nazrul Islam's. Sukanta was a poet of the town, of Calcutta, to be more precise. He did not have the depth and range of the experiences of Nazrul Islam, who spent most of his creative life in Calcutta, but who knew the whole of Bengal and all sections of the population. Sukanta's symbols are urban : he chose commonplace objects like

cigarettes, matches, stair-cases, the bird hanging from electric wires, and the like, and made them yield him a message of revolution. Nazrul Islam's symbols came from nature and mythology.

The violence Nazrul Islam preached was anti-bourgeois. The middle-class temperament abhors chaos, which it designates as the law-and-order problem ; Nazrul Islam did not. What he said fifty years ago has been said later by writers like Frantz Fanon. Violence must be met by counter-violence, the oppressors have been violent for centuries, so must be the oppressed if they want to win their freedom.

Satyendranath Datta, the only other poet who had striven for originality in the age of Rabindranath, and who had made a deep impression on Nazrul Islam which is borne out by the fact that Nazrul Islam wrote as many as four poems on him after his death at a comparatively early age, once created a furore by writing a poem on the scavenger whom he called a friend of mankind. The subject was new and, therefore, sensational ; yet even as he wrote a distance intervened between the poet and his subject. But when Nazrul Islam writes on the coolies and prostitutes, on the peasants and labourers, the distance is eliminated by his warmth, sympathy and complete identification with them. He does neither glorify nor pity them ; he voices their feelings and sentiments. The proletariat in his poetry is not, consequently, an idea ; he does not see them as happy town-dwellers see the countryside. If it be true that truth in art is nothing more than conviction, then Nazrul Islam's literature is wholly truthful. Speaking of poetry, Milton noted that it should be "simple, sensuous and passionate". This description not only characterises the poetry of Milton's own creation but is also qualified to suit works of all poets having a revolutionary message. While it is quite useless to split hair over the description, there can be no denying the fact that Milton derived it from the depth of his feelings and commitments. Nazrul Islam was like Milton, if not in genius and achievement, very much in respect of mental make-up. Milton's adjectives apply to the works of the rebel poet of Bengal much in the same sense in which they applied to the great

poet of revolt in the nineteenth century Bengal, Michael Madhusudan Dutt. A poet who desires to use his poetry not as a source of pleasure for a chosen few, but as a weapon for waging a war of emancipation for his country must be simple and passionate. Nazrul Islam writes with involvement and wants to move his audience emotionally. He has neither the modern poet's ironic self-detachment nor his conversational tone. Like Milton, he is fond of details and he moves on from one image to another in the process of making his ideas perceptible to the reader. In fact images come to him not singly but in numbers, like a crowd, almost in a procession. His images are concrete and visual, they act and demonstrate. As we read them we realize how a poet's imagination is like the child's world inhabited by characters and figures that are more alive than their real counterparts, that the real is incomparably less real than the poetic. It is, of course, meaningful that he was fond of comparing himself with Keats, for like Keats he not only conceives an image but loves it and even partakes of its life. He adopts myths and legends from local as well as alien traditions and also creates new ones. Being inimical to idolatry, the Bengali Muslims had not developed any system of myths and legends, things they considered to be irreligious. The orthodox section of the community did even forbid the practice of the arts like music and dancing. A poet born to this society, therefore, has to grope for a viable source of symbolism and imagery. Nazrul Islam did what no other Muslim poet in modern Bengal had dared to do; he created images and symbols out of the well-known heroes from Muslim history. Thus Tariq and Qasim, Ali and Omar, Hasan and Hussain and even the Prophet himself figure in his poetry as historical beings. He also transformed men like Kamal Pasha and Anwar Pasha into symbols. The method is somewhat similar to the one Yeats employed in his poetry.

Nazrul Islam was a religious man, but he was absolutely non-communal. He had married a Hindu woman, and he knew about both the Muslim and the Hindu ways of life. This gave him an incomparable advantage over his other contemporaries, for it enabled

him to choose his myths and allusions from two pantheons and not one. He did this deliberately and, as he himself realized, at the cost of art. Others, even Rabindranath, used only one, leaving the other source untapped. The cause of communal harmony owes not a small debt to him. The literary significance of this was enormous ; for it gave his writings an exceptional breadth and variety.

The poetry Nazrul Islam wrote is characterised by an abundant use of rhetorical devices. Rhetoric can be used to hide vagueness of thought ; but rhetoric can also be a product of sincerity and conviction. Nazrul Islam's rhetoric belongs to the second category. He is rhetorical because he is sincere to himself ; and convinced about the rightness of his cause. It is true that he did not always have time to polish his lines, it is also true that he was not a fastidious writer. He writes with passion, and, therefore, sometimes, without proper organisation. Still he had a regular and settled style, which was free from artificiality and was rich in sensuousness. Nazrul Islam is not a scholarly poet ; but despite his occasional lapses into verbosity, he 'sees' through his words no less than he 'feels' for them. What is most important of all is that polished or unpolished his lines never fail to communicate the intensity of feelings that they contain. Of him one should say, as Dr. Johnson once said of Pope, "If he is not a poet, where is poetry to be found ?"

In his poetry Nazrul Islam had announced his very lofty sense of individualism. He would not bow down to any authority, to any power however great it might be, not even to the Creator, as he once declared in a frenzy of exuberance. Yet it is clear even to the most casual of his readers that the poet is not so much against God as against the wrongs that are perpetrated in the name of God. "I do not salute any one—except myself" was his motto. The bi-weekly *Dhumketu* (Comet) declared in 1922 that it stood for full independence. This declaration was as unequivocal as it was courageous. For although people all over India had felt the need for full independence and there was much talk about it in the educated circles, Nazrul Islam's was the first

newspaper in Bengal to make the demand in public. It is worthwhile to mention here that about that time not even the politicians had demanded independence, they talked of 'dominion status' and 'self-government'. Hiasrat Mohani, an Urdu poet and politician, had moved a resolution in the Allahabad session of the Indian National Congress for full independence, but he did not get the support of the leadership, including Gandhi, and was duly arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment on the charge of treason.

To Nazrul Islam freedom was a wide concept, for apart from political freedom it included freedom from rules and conventions, bonds and chains, prohibitions and taboos. We must therefore rise in revolt. But before that it would be necessary to know ourselves. With bold hearts we should declare, "I bend my head to none except myself". This is self-reverence and self-confidence rather than ego-centricity. The 'I' is not selfish, arrogant, or conceited; on the contrary, the poet has identified himself with the suffering humanity, he is speaking on behalf of the lowly and the underprivileged. He is present in every line he wrote and it is always a pleasure to meet him.

Devotionalism has been one of the outstanding features of Bengali poetry. Poets have sung of the ultimate reality and have craved for a union with it. Rabindranath sums up in himself all that is best in devotionalism. While it is true, as we have already noted, that Nazrul Islam has written on God and has sought His guidance, the more significant is the fact that he has also dared to defy Him. This defiance was new in Bengali poetry.

Like all great poets, Rabindranath had made it difficult for a new poet to be original. One could not see what lay beyond him as Dr. Johnson did not see how Pope could be improved upon by any succeeding practitioner. It seemed to all that Rabindranath had exhausted the possibilities of the language. To write poetry in the age of Rabindranath was to imitate him. Nazrul Islam entered the literature of Bengal when Rabindranath was at the height of his glory and

proved, as soon as he came, that he was very different from the great master.

The early poetry of Rabindranath was predominantly lyrical. True, there is, in his poetry, a glorification of movement and he likened his soul to the flying cranes and the running spring, yet the Bergsonian *elan vital* in him does not have the vigour and impatience of the rebel in Nazrul Islam. By the time Nazrul Islam arrived the political and cultural atmosphere had begun to smell of fire ; there was violence in the air and excitement in all quarters. Rabindranath wrote essays and poems reflecting the resurgent Bengal, but there was in him an aloofness that did not satisfy the young and youthful. The sensibility had altered and it awaited a new poet to be its exponent. This gap was supplied by Nazrul Islam. And once he had written, the literature produced before him assumed a new significance ; the history of Bengali literature was not the same as before. What happened here always happens when a new and significant poet arrives ; as Eliot points out, a new and significant poet alters the significances of the works by his predecessors.

Nazrul Islam is different. For although there are streaks of sentimentalism in him, on the whole he is more rugged than Rabindranath. This is at once his weakness and strength. Rabindranath's sophistication and refinement one should not expect in Nazrul Islam who was almost an outsider to the tradition of which Rabindranath was the consummation. Just as Blake rehabilitated in English poetry the lyricism of the Elizabethans, Nazrul Islam brought back to Bengali poetry masculine words of Arabic and Persian origin which the Muslims used in everyday conversation. Poets like Satyendranath Datta and Mohitlal Majumdar had used such words in their delineation of a few, but only a few, Muslim subjects and themes, but these words were not a part of their regular vocabulary. It was Nazrul Islam who, for the first time, in the history of modern Bengali poetry, made these words an important constituent of his diction. What is more, he was not apologetic. This scandalized the writers, even Rabindranath, who thought that the young man was

trying to shave with a sword. But despite opposition and ridicule, the words endured. Because Nazrul Islam had a keen ear for music and knew how to fuse a unity between words and sounds and between sounds and sounds. Words, phrases and idioms that had grown musty with neglect he dusted and forced into use with a skill not usually paralleled. The result was an enrichment of the literary vocabulary as well as an addition to its colour and expressiveness. Thus he performed a function which only a man of genius, a poet like Wordsworth for example, can do. Also, he freely employed words of Sanskrit origin and achieved unprecedented effect. A part of the virility of his lines lay in the harmonious juxtaposition of the two kinds of words.

Nazrul Islam's vigour reminds one of Michael Madhusudan Dutt. Despite his turning to Christianity and his declaration that he would like to speak and even dream in English, Madhusudan was the prodigal returned home. For he was great only as a poet of the collective consciousness of the community to which he was born. Nazrul Islam was the much-needed Michael of the Muslim community, drawing upon and representing the collective good sense he inherited and belonged to. Nazrul Islam projected the image of his society in the way Whitman projected the image of America.

Nazrul Islam was always responsive to the contemporary issues and wrote on most of them. He added to Bengali poetry its note of contemporaneity, a quality that constitutes one of the characteristic marks of modernity in poetry. This greatly helped the process of bringing Bengali poetry closer to life. But he was, as we have suggested earlier, aloof from the modern poets of the thirties, smart young men turned out by the universities of Calcutta and Dacca who hurled notes of defiance at an elderly Rabindranath and shocked the prudery of Bengal by writing without inhibition on sex. They introduced to the reading public poets like Eliot and writers like Lawrence and Huxley primarily because they thought they belonged to a time of disillusion, and also because they thought it was by imitating European writers that they would be able to escape

the all-pervading influence of Rabindranath. They took an academic interest in low and humble life. Nazrul Islam made friends with them, wrote in their journals, but could never be one of the group, because his differences from them were basic. He was loud and rhetorical, simple and passionate, attributes that modernist writers strove to relinquish.

It has been said that men are either Hamlets or Don Quixotes. We have had the self-conscious, middle-class intellectuals, one of whom, Bishnu Dey, attempted to produce in his writings a synthesis of Marx and Eliot; but we were in need of a Don Quixote, the archetypal adventurer, the fighter against evil and the prototype of the good man. Nazrul Islam is our wayfaring Don Quixote.

The rebelliousness of the young poets like Buddhadeva Bose was different in character from the revolt of Nazrul Islam. For their rebellion was against Rabindranath; it was a literary revolt and it was foredoomed to fail because Rabindranath was overwhelmingly more powerful than the young aspirants to literary fame. They wanted to go beyond Rabindranath; but Rabindranath was not stationary, he was changing his style, to the despair of the young rebels. The literary rebellion did not come off. In Nazrul Islam there was no conscious desire to revolt; his revolt sprang inevitably from his way of life, it came in response to a deeply-felt necessity. Rabindranath was not the name of a poet only, he represented an outlook on life. Hence he could not be excelled by anyone having the same taste or temperament as his. Nazrul Islam had read Rabindranath, he sang Rabindranath's songs, but he was different from Rabindranath in his outlook, taste and temperament. We can do no better than quote from an essay Nazrul Islam wrote :

Rabindranath has been fortunate, he has no idea how the young writers have to struggle for existence, sometimes going without food. We do not grudge him his fortune, we pray that he spared our experience. Rabindranath has never stepped inside our cottage, his greatness would not have been soiled if he had done so ;

and if he had he would have seen how great our poverty was. We hide ourselves in a corner. Far from touring one country after another on missions of preaching, we are even afraid of coming out of our houses. The mended patches on our torn clothes are much too conspicuous for that. We feel out of sorts in the company of educated gentlemen. The more fierce becomes the lashing of poverty, the more strong gets the revolt of our mind.

Youth is usually very short-lived in Bengal. We have extended childhood and very early dotage; our children behave like old men and women, carrying with them the burden of agonies and miseries that beset life in this poor land, and grown-up persons behave like children, having had premature senility in their childhood. Bold and adventurous youth is difficult to find. The sense of responsibility that goes with adulthood is peculiarly absent. In this atmosphere of adolescence and dotage, Nazrul Islam introduced the spirit of youth and responsibility. He is nothing if not bold and adventurous, conscious and responsible.

It would be illuminating to place him, once again, alongside Buddhadeva Bose. Buddhadeva Bose was an important writer, he also was youthful in his outlook and language, and had an appeal to the youth. But Buddhadeva's youthfulness was that of an educated young man's, it was more deliberate and less unself-conscious than Nazrul Islam's. Buddhadeva represented the urban middle-class youth, his heroes are university-trained men who had read a lot of literature, were fond of quoting poetry, and were more at home in the world of books than in the world of politics or that of the struggle for existence. Nazrul Islam's youthfulness is more reckless and loud, his heroes have sentiments but they are not denizens of the world of books. It would not be unfair to say that Nazrul Islam's loud clamours for freedom were indicative of his bondage, but it must also be said that he knew that he was bound and did not accept his bondage as his freedom as the heroes of Buddhadeva did; on the contrary, he was impatient to be free. Buddhadeva was an admirer of both Baude-

laire and Lawrence, an unlikely couple if ever there was one. Yet the fact that he sought inspiration from both is symptomatic of the nature of his genius : he lacked the virtues of either, and imitated only the externals of the two writers. He had shocked, more than he had startled. Sex was an intellectual, rather than an emotional, preoccupation with him. Jibanananda Das, a greater poet than Buddhadeva, does not sing of the youth ; nor does Sudhindranath Dutta. These three poets are different from each other, but they belonged to the same modernist tradition from which Nazrul Islam was separated as much by his temperament and inclinations as his background and preparation.

Poetry came to him naturally and without effort. He produced lines that no effort could improve. But in his brief and hectic career as a poet he never knew any respite. He could not afford to recollect his emotions with tranquillity, he delivered the ideas as they occurred to him.

Although it is customary to consider Nazrul Islam as a poet of revolt yet no account of his poetic career is complete without taking into account the poems of love and nature that he wrote. In fact there are critics who believe that Nazrul Islam's poems on love and nature would last even when his more widely known poems of protest and defiance have been forgotten.

In his reply to the address presented to him at the civic reception in Calcutta, the poet said,

I do not hesitate to admit that I have not been able to rise above Power-truth and Beauty-truth. What I have given is petty and I do not know how far I have succeeded in giving something worthwhile to society, but I am sure I have not yet been able to offer to it the whole of myself ; my desire in this respect is yet to be fulfilled. The lost spring of water that I am looking for is at the top of the mountain and I beseech you to pray that I do not desecrate the glory at the top.

I belong to this century of unattainable achievements. Let this be my greatest mark of

distinction....My birth in this country and this society does not mean that I shall be constricted and confined to them. No, I belong to all countries and to all men. To contemplate and sing of Beauty is my worship, my religion.

II

To come from his world of 'Power-truth', as he calls it, to that of 'Beauty-truth' is to enter a different world and meet a different aspect of the poet. For here in this region of beauty, we have a poet who is quiet, melancholy and contemplative.

Nazrul Islam wrote unforgettable poems on love and nature and created a sensuous world rich in colour, sound and smell. In his nature-poems we see almost all the flowers we know in Bengal, hear almost all the tunes we have heard in this country. Not satisfied, he makes journeys to the Middle East in search of mountains and hills, blooming flowers and singing brooks. In his love-poems Nazrul Islam is sentimental, pining, imploring and almost effeminate. He is sad, suffering from self-pity, and he enjoys being sad. A heavy feeling of separation oppresses him, relentlessly. Gone are the notes of turbulence and violence; he has become tame and restful. It is on more tranquil things that his imagination now dwells. The silent tree, the melancholy sky, the slow-moving river, the shining moon and the shy village girl are some of his oft-repeated images in his love-poetry. The Dionysian seems to have turned the Appollonian.

His lines on love are richly embellished, but they are never fustian. As a love-poet Nazrul Islam is fairly traditional: he does not break or overthrow the old concepts and modes of expression; he accepts them, masters them, and uses them in his own distinctive style. While singing of love he has disburdened himself of his public responsibility and has become a singing voice, connecting himself with the long and rich tradition of love-poetry in the Bengali language. He connects himself with history, and yet retains his

individuality. Nazrul Islam suffers from self-pity, not so much because the beloved is unattainable, though unattainable she is, as because he is in love with himself. He needs his beloved, and to win her he is prepared to throw himself at her feet ; but whatever he does or says, he remains incapable of forgetting himself.

The beloved is a cruel woman, prone to reject and difficult to please. Yet she is a creature of flesh and blood. Nazrul Islam did not believe in disembodied love as many others in our literature did. It is not incorrect to say that his concept of love is not different from Whitman's. Incidentally, Nazrul Islam had translated Whitman into Bengali.

When he writes on nature Nazrul Islam invests nature with a personality : natural objects in his poetry are alive, not mere spectators, but participants in human affairs. In some poems he has used natural objects as symbols ; but most of his nature poems are statements of relationship with, and love for, nature. He sees, interprets, and appreciates nature in human terms. In Bengal nature has never been a mere backdrop, and Nazrul Islam's poems are an important addition to our rich heritage of nature poetry.

He has treated of all the seasons of the year. But he is not a poet of the summer and the spring, as we would expect him to be inasmuch as he is a poet of both revolt and love, but a poet of the rainy season in the same sense in which a contemporary of his, Jibanananda Das, is a poet of the autumn. His is a wet world, wet with tears, rain and dew. Real and metaphorical water abound in his poetry. Apart from the well-known rivers of the Padma, the Jamuna and the Karnaphuli, we have, in his poems, rivers of melody, of sorrow, and even of benevolence. He has written a poem of unequalled beauty on the sea ; and there are places where the sea is used as a symbol of strength and youth. We see him writing on boats, sails and boatmen. In one poem the ferry-boat takes on a symbolic meaning. Very often the poet is found weeping together with the wind and the sky. His thirst is unquenchable. The note of self-pity we talked of fits in with this water-cooled scheme of things.

Nazrul Islam wrote many devotional poems, most of which are for the Muslims, but some are for the Hindus. That the poet who was rebellious should be so submissive as he is in the devotional poems need not surprise us. For similar instances are known in literary history. Swinburne is a case in point. He had defied the Victorian values ; but time and again, he had returned, like an exhausted bird, to the rooted tradition. After having claimed to be a worshipper of none but himself and priding himself upon his rejection of the creator, Nazrul Islam bowed down to God with a quietness similar to the one that comes over nature after a violent storm. If Nazrul Islam was repetitive, so was Swinburne, and both suffered from certain fixations created in their adolescence.

Nazrul Islam was like Swinburne in his skill in versification. Like Swinburne, he was given to playing with metres. There are instances where he seems to have been swept off his feet by the charm of sounds and stopped when his physical power, and not his ideas, had exhausted itself.

Some critics are inclined to think that Nazrul Islam's writings on love and nature constitute his real title to greatness and that these quiet poems will outlast his loud poems on revolt. This is an arguable point. Nevertheless the fact remains that it is in the region of his revolt that this poet's distinction, peculiarity and characteristic are to be sought and found. He would not be as significant as he is, had he written only on love and nature. It would not be untrue to say that his love and nature poems derive a part of their importance from the very fact that they were written by a rebellious poet.

And it is also true that between the loud poet and the quiet poet there is a unity which should not be lost sight of. Because to miss the relationship between the rebel and the lover would be to misunderstand Nazrul Islam as a poet. Nazrul Islam is always a lover of beauty and he wants life to be beautiful. But seeing life robbed of its beauty he revolted, revolted against the forces that were responsible for the destruction of beauty. His vision is of a complete life, but he found real life to

be miserably incomplete. His protest is an outcome of his love.

It is to be noted that despite his proclamation that he said in his poetry whatever occurred to him at a particular moment, despite his saying that he was not an artist at all, he remained a poet whenever he wrote. His aesthetic standard was sure and steady, he would make no compromise there. He is rough in his anger but not in his style. He is no ascetic in literature, he is a sensuous man. Nazrul Islam's style is never barren, bare or naked. He deals with reality, but reality is idealised in his poetry. In his poem on the subject, poverty is cruel and relentless, but is yet capable of according its victim a certain Christ-like dignity. His poetry is about life, but it is also above life. Nazrul Islam knew the 'glory' of life as much as he knew its 'horror and boredom'. The two faces of the poet, one of the rebel and the other of the lover, complement, rather than contradict, each other.

The unity is reflected in the fact that he wrote the two kinds of poetry simultaneously. Thus while doing the translation of the *Internationale* and writing the poem called "the song of the blood-stained flag" he took his time off to write poems like "Your raven eyes are so tearful" and "Why are your young fresh eyes so sad?" Angry revolt and gentle contemplation of beauty have sometimes coalesced within the same poem. *Vidrohi*, for example, is a turbulent poem, but it has a still, unagitated central core. Whatever he is speaking of, of violence or surrender, the poet is always romantic.

His world of love and nature is shaded and secluded, tranquil and tearful. But it has its own strength and vitality. His love poems have a dramatic quality. The poet addresses his beloved about whose real identity he is uncertain, for she is eternally mysterious. Now she is jealous, in the next poem she is absent-minded. She is cruel and also sad. She is unknown and also familiar. If she is a neighbour now, she may become a wayfarer the next moment. We even see her living in an island as a prisoner. The lover himself changes continually. There is variety, curiosity and liveliness, spontaneity and ease in Nazrul Islam's love poems. Some of his love

poems are written in the form of dramatic monologues ; many of his poems have a musical quality and can be sung as songs.

His awareness of, and acquaintance with, glory in life is seen not only in his poems on love and nature but also in what he wrote for the children.

Children's literature has been a neglected thing in Bengal. The folk tradition of tales and legends has been very rich, but the great nineteenth century writers were not known to have written anything substantial for the children. The feeling that it is necessary to write for the children grew in the twentieth century. And Rabindranath, great as he was in all respects, was the pioneer even here. Sukumar Roy, the father of the now-famous film director, Satyajit Roy, wrote nonsense verse of unequalled beauty.

Like Rabindranath, Nazrul Islam knew the psychology of children. He had two purposes in writing for children : to create fun, and to rouse in them a curiosity to know and an ambition to achieve greatness.

One of his remarkable poems is on a young hero who went to steal fruits from the garden of a neighbour. The adventure promised to be successful till suddenly the branch he was hanging on broke and he fell down. To add to his misery he fell on the head of the guard who was standing beneath the tree. The guard was a wicked man, he gave the little thief a good smacking. But the hero was not to be put off, he ran, for his life. Then, lo and behold, there was an owlish jackal waiting. No, not a jackal, it was only a dog. "I was struck with horror", says the thief, for he is narrating his adventure in the poem. He started running, so did the dog. Escaping narrowly, the boy says he will not go for stealing again. Anyone who has read this poem, and it has been read by all educated men in Bengal, will find it impossible to forget. In the poem a child's feelings of greed, fear, courage and his bravado have been treated with consummate skill. The moral lesson at the end comes inconspicuously but inevitably, like the beating that the guard had given the luckless thief.

There are other pieces which are equally popular. A child's reaction to the breaking of dawn, his dramatic monologue with a squirrel, his poking fun at the snub nose of his grandfather—whatever Nazrul Islam writes on he writes with a magic that pleases not only the young but also the adult. He enters the very soul of the child, looks at the world with the eyes of a child, and speaks in the language that a child would be expected to use. Our only regret is that he did not have the time to write too many of these poems. For any poet the poems would be a major achievement, for a poet who is noted for his anger they were an astonishing feat. Children were dear to his heart. It is generally held that the death of his second child, Bulbul, was a major factor contributing to the mental disorder that silenced the most loud voice this century had produced in Bengal. What Nazrul Islam wrote for the children confirms us in our belief that inside all his sound and fury there was a central core of innocence; he who wrote of 'experience' knew 'innocence' very intimately indeed.

Some of the poems were written with the purpose of stimulating in the minds of children a desire to know the unknown, to conquer the unexplored, to win wreaths of honour and glory. He wanted the children to be free in mind and thinking. When the daily *Azad*, a popular newspaper during the last days of the British in India, started a page for the children, Nazrul Islam's message to the young readers of the page was characteristic :

Do consider the honour of martyrdom
more glorious than slavery,
Consider the sword to be nobler than
the belt of the peon,
Do not pray to God for anything petty ;
Bow not your head to anyone except God.

If poems are untranslatable, Nazrul Islam's poems are particularly so, and in the English rendering attempted above, and elsewhere, it has been possible to give only a paraphrase of what the lines contain; the actual lines are infinitely more artful, much of their appeal

being dependent upon the sound of the words and the vigour inherent in the rhythm. In most other poems the message is concealed, the lesson is woven into the imagination. Nazrul Islam never sees the child from the outside, he speaks as an insider, as a child. When one of the boys in the group of poems called *Sat Bhai Champa* (Seven Brothers) tells his mother about his intention of being a bird of the dawn, of his desire to rise before everything else, one feels that it is none other than a child who is speaking. "Mother", says the boy, "you will try to keep me in bed, you'll say, 'it is too early to rise, it's not morning yet.' But I'll tell you, 'you foolish girl ; you're mistaken : if your son does not rise, how do you think the day shall break ?'" Another child declares in its own unmistakable voice that he wants to be merchant, braving the uncharted waters.

Nazrul Islam's popularity with children was immense. And this popularity is not at all difficult to account for.

Poets whose sensibility is heightened by imagination do not normally write satirical verse. Nazrul Islam was a romantic in imagination and a rebel in temperament, yet he had a very lively sense of humour ever-ready to ridicule the abnormalities he saw around him. In his collection called *Chandra Vindu* (the Nasal Mark) he put together satirical poems written on subjects like the cowardice of the Bengalees, the unfruitful attempts at communal harmony and the so-called political pacts. Elsewhere he has written on politics in Bengal, on the brother-in-law (the wife's brother is a subject of fun in Bengal) and even on the contemporary practice of writing free-verse.

This poet's exceptional versatility, his abundance of power and energy are seen in the facility with which he wrote on an extraordinarily wide range of subjects. It is not known how many poems he wrote on weddings of men and women he knew and on the births of their children. He wrote when important persons died, wrote when important meetings were held. These occasional verses are not without their merit and beauty. The likening of a poet's voice to the Aeolian harp applies to no one in Bengal as it does to Nazrul Islam.

Like all great poets challenging the established literary taste, Nazrul Islam met opposition from the literary establishment. Some critics found fault with his diction, some wrote parodies of his more well-known poems. Social hostility was even fiercer. By writing in favour of progress and change Nazrul Islam had earned the wrath of the British rulers as well as of the orthodox sections of his own community. The British government threw him behind prison bars, the conservative Muslims sought to hound him out of society. He was called an atheist, a renegade Muslim, a son of Satan born to sow seeds of discord and confusion among the faithfuls. But however shrill the voice of conservatism might be, the popularity of the poet grew apace and unabated. The forces that opposed him suffered defeat, and, like all great poets, he succeeded in creating his own audience. He refused to be ignored or patronised.

III

Some Books By Nazrul Islam

Agni Vina (the Burning Lute)

Of all the books Nazrul Islam published, the most widely known is *Agni Vina* (The Burning Lute). The ten poems collected in this volume breathe the spirit of the title: they seek to burn away, like a corrosive fire, the oppression of the weak and the cowardice in the oppressed. Some of the titles are: *Vidrohi* (the rebel), *Kamal Pasha*, *Dhumketu* (the Comet), *Raana Vheri* (the war-drum), *Muhurram*, *Shat-il-Arab* and *Kheyaparar Tarani* (the ferry boat). *Vidrohi* was largely responsible for establishing the fame of Nazrul Islam as a major poet. In *Kamal Pasha* and *Anwar Pasha*, he sings of the valour and heroism of the Turkish leaders. His experience in the army must have been of help to him in writing the poems. *Kamal Pasha* has the rhythm of a march song sung in chorus by a group of marching soldiers who frequently break into loud cheers of "Hurrah Ho". The form was new and it took the audience by surprise. *Kamal* was a

nationalist, Anwar believed in Pan-Islamism ; the poet does not, however, note the difference ; he sings of both. His 'Muharrum' does not mourn the death of Hasan and Hossain, rather it exhorts the fallen Muslims to be imbued with the ideals of sacrifice set up by the two heroes of Islam. The motto is,

The month of *Muharrum* is come back,
No, do not weep, only sacrifice is wanted,
and no laments.

Kheyaparar Tarani is one of the shorter and simpler poems. In the title there is perhaps no suggestion of the storm-tossed river the poem describes. It is a dark night, the weather is stormy and the river turbulent. Passengers stand on the bank of the river, frightened, not knowing what to do. Suddenly, they see a ferry boat rowed by the four Caliphs of Islam. On perilous waters the boat sails confidently. The turbulence and the storm are described in the poem with a great skill. The poem was suggested by a picture a Muslim woman from Dacca had sent for publication in a Calcutta journal.

Vidrohi announces the poet's determination to fight against all evils in the world, particularly the oppressor's wrong. He compared himself to the violent objects in nature, mighty warriors in legends and history and deadly weapons of modern warfare. Like the West Wind of Shelley, the rebel wants to bring death and destruction to the old and decadent. He is whimsical and playful ; he dallies with life as freely as with death. But the poet is also a lover, modest and shy, coy like a village girl. The poem ends on a quiet note which seems to be unanticipated. Like Keats's unexpected generalisation at the end of "Ode on a Grecian Urn", Nazrul Islam's *Vidrohi* springs a surprise on us with the final statement that he would be silent only after all tyranny and oppression had been eradicated from the world. But looking backward, remembering what happens in the poem, the broad feeling of sympathy that the poet has expressed for the oppressed in the world as also his interest in life and love for beauty, one feels that there have been scattered hints in the poem which

are gathered together and given a final form in its conclusion.

Visher Vanshi (The Poison Flute)

Nazrul Islam wanted to incorporate some new poems and songs in the second edition of *Agni Vina*. Later he changed his mind and, instead, brought out a new volume under the title *Visher Vanshi* (The Poison Flute). The book was banned as soon as it was published. In his preface to the book the poet said, "The poison of this flute I collected from the oppressed country and from all the ills I had suffered at the hands of a cruel fate". The underlying unity between the poems and songs in the volume is provided by the poet's feeling of protest and revolt. One of the poems, *Vidrohir Vaani* (the message of the rebel), says, "We protest against all kinds of hypocrisy. We are determined to win full independence for our country. This is the flag of our victory; we shall either reach Heaven or sink into Hell". The poet himself was in the Hoogly jail when he wrote the poem, and he knew that those who were outside were not freer than he. While political leaders were arguing among themselves as to the extent of freedom that should be demanded from the British, Nazrul Islam's declaration was unequivocal; it was full independence that was needed.

The poet's optimism is unextinguishable. "We have come to your prison not to be your prisoners, but to conquer the fear of prison", he says in one poem. "You have taken Gandhi prisoner, but you can never imprison Truth", sings the chorus in one of the songs. "Hail, say hail/The new age has dawned/There comes the blood-stained turning of an age," we read in a third piece.

Speaking of death the poet says in a poem that he sees his country to be infested with death. Death, violent death, is welcome, because it will kill those who die before dying, and grant life to the living.

Included in this volume is a poem called *Jhar* (the storm) in which the storm talks of its own self with a rapidity that becomes it. The poem imitates the move-

ment of a raging storm. It is a destructive force, yet its heart tingles to see in the weather a forsaken girl in distress weeping tears of rain. In the final stanza the storm says that it is not a storm but the loud neighing of the red-horse of revolution :

No, No, I must go but I'll come again,
You, my rebel friend ; You keep awake ;
You, the keeper of this red-horse ;

Dolan Chapa

This is a collection of poems on love and beauty. *Pujarini* (the priestess) is the longest of the poems in the book. This poem gives an exposition of the poet's concept of love. The lover has known the beloved from time immemorial. He has been passing through a cycle of reincarnations and has always loved the priestess. Their love lives beyond time. The girl belongs to the tradition of Bengali love poetry. Yet the poet has known her distinctly and physically :

That voice, that dove-bewailing melody,
Those eyes, that force,
That eye-brow, forehead, chin,
That matchless beauty of yours,
That ambling swan-defeating dance of your gait,
I know, I know all ;

Together, they have had moments of impossible ecstasy followed by periods of unbearable separation. Love brought joy, but it also brought pangs of sorrow. The lover that speaks in this volume has been incipient in *Visher Vanshi* where the poet said, "In one hand I carry a twisted bamboo flute, a war-bugle in another".

In one of the poems Nazrul Islam makes a successful experiment with Arabic versification. Another poem, on *Poush*, one of the months that constitute the winter in Bengal, displays the usual characteristics of his nature poetry. *Poush* is also the month of harvesting, and as the poet watches the peasants gathering corn he is reminded of his own painful separation from the beloved. The poem was written in Presidency Jail.

Sindhu Hindol (Undulation on the sea)

The first three poems in this collection are on the sea. He describes the violent sea with its unquenchable thirst as a lover in the throes of an unrequited love; he is roaring because he is unhappy, because he wants to be united with his beloved. Nazrul Islam has turned facts of science into poetry. The knowledge that sea-tides are caused by the waxing of the moon has been turned into the myth of the sea's love for the moon. The poet makes excellent use of the life on the water, of the fish, boats and waves, and also of the sky overhead. The formation of clouds out of water yields the poet a beautiful myth. The sea is his friend, because he, too, is a weeping and pining lover. The poem is written in rhymed verse with the consequence that the tumult and turbulence of the roaring sea remains content without losing its character. Another important poem is the one on poverty. Poverty, he says, has made him great. It has turned his blooming heaven into a desert; it has also given him a Christ-like eminence, the undaunted courage of unabashed expression. The poet is not afraid, he accepts the reality of poverty with a remarkable and fully convincing, openness. Particularly moving is an image set at the heart of the poem—that of the poet's starving children weeping around their helpless father. Nazrul Islam has turned poverty into an extraordinarily rich material for poetry. It has not lost its starkness, nevertheless it has become an object of beauty. It would be difficult to find a second poem like this in the Bengali language.

Chakravak (The Flamingo)

Chakravak comprises poems on love and nature; but it is difficult to separate his love poems from his nature poems, because while writing on love he uses nature imagery and in natural objects he finds his beloved. The poems were written during Nazrul Islam's stay at Chittagong and Sandwip. He weeps with the river Karnaphuli, and remembers in the title of the book the birds he had seen flying over the river.

One of the poems, *Vatayan Pashe Gubak Tarur Shari* (Betelnut Palms beside my window) describes the feelings of the poet on leaving the trees behind :

In your leaves I have seen her
 black eye-lashes,
Your body is as tall as hers ;
And in your trilling, whistling noise,
 there is her shy voice ;
From your branches hangs, her *saree*—
And your breeze is as intimately dear
 as the touch of her finger.

Siter Sindhu (the sea in winter) gives a picture of a sea different from the one we met earlier. It is calm, forgetful, without a core, and mysterious ; yet it is a lover and a friend.

CHAPTER V

THE COMPULSIVE SPEAKER

It was in the nineteenth century that Bengali prose was developed. Whereas Bengali poetry has a history of more than one thousand years, Bengali prose is not more than two hundred years old. But it grew up in the age of heroic poetry. For the late nineteenth century, like the seventeenth century in England, was an age of heroism and of epic poetry. Nazrul Islam was a bold man, his imagination was dauntless, but it lacked the heroic qualities of the epical imagination.

It is not difficult to find fault with his prose. He exaggerated, made overstatements, and was repetitive. He is neither a sage nor an ascetic : he does not have very profound or very new ideas to offer, nor does he write with the cautious deliberation of a sceptic. He writes because he loves to talk, and does not tire of talking. He writes with excitement and under compulsion ; he hates as passionately as he loves.

Nazrul Islam was incapable of writing the kind of restrained and conversational prose that Swift, for example, wrote. There is no dearth of feelings and sentiments in his writings. And it is a common knowledge that sentiments and feelings are less easy to deal with in prose than in poetry, for in prose the help of metre and rhythm is unavailable. He wrote on the ordinary, but whatever he wrote on he transformed into poetry. Words rush in his prose with sound and fury : they seem to be unruly, they threaten to embarrass, even overpower, the meaning. Yet logic, consistency and discipline are never sacrificed.

Moreover, his words are richer in suggestion than in meaning : they flash with brilliance and brightness, creating on the readers an impression that remains even after the meaning has been forgotten. Thematically he

is repetitive, his range is not wide, but he is always attractive, unfailingly charming. A striking phrase here, a rhythmic line there, a sensuous image in the next line are sure to stick in your memory after you have read one of his pieces. And when you remember them you not only recall the pieces where they occur but also the pleasure you derived while reading them.

Nazrul Islam knew how to make use of the auditory qualities of words profitably. His musical talents work wonders, alliteration and assonance invest his lines with a musical liveliness. The rhythm remains alert and active. Local, Sanskrit-derived, and loan words combine to produce effects of manly eloquence.

As a prose writer he was not a conversationalist. Far from it, he was an orator. He does not talk or discuss, he speaks in monologues, very often like a public speaker. His spontaneity is remarkable, for he does not strain after thoughts. He stresses his points where he needs to, raises his voice where he must, and, what is more, does not forget to offer the readers the respite they need. He goes very near his readers and enters their mind without their knowing it. Nazrul Islam argues in terms of pictures and elucidates through images. Words are piled upon words to clinch a point. Personifications abound in the language he uses. His sentences are epigrammatical and well-balanced. There are times when his prose pieces give the impression of a series of pictures tied together by a thread provided by the theme. His purpose was to rouse his audience rather than bring illumination, and he achieved his purpose to an unusual degree. Reading his prose is an experience, it is like going on a journey along a road full of beauties and surprises. As it always happens in reading good literature, the journey is more important than the destination to be reached.

Nazrul Islam wrote both fictional and non-fictional prose, the difference between which two kinds is akin to the difference between his worlds of love and revolt. Whereas in non-fictional prose his concern is with topical and contemporary issues, in fictional writings he deals with such problems of human relationship as have significance and validity beyond time and space. But

whatever he writes about Nazrul Islam remains always himself.

It was a writer of prose that he made his first approach to literature. His later turning to poetry augured well for our poetry, but at the cost of our prose. With the exception of Mir Musharraf Hossain there has been no comparable prose writer among the Muslims.

II

Non-fictional Prose

Nazrul Islam's journalistic career was short but eventful. What is more, it maps out the characteristics of, and the process of change in, his outlook on politics, in which his involvement was more than academic. For he was a member of the working committee of a political party and had even contested election for a seat in the Indian Legislative Assembly, albeit unsuccessfully.

The first newspaper he wrote for was A. K. Fazlul Huq's the *Nava Yug* (New Age), of which he and his friend, Comrade Muzaffar Ahmed, were joint editors. The paper died before it could complete a year's publication, yet it had made its impact on its continually increasing readership and had disturbed the government. Fazlul Huq and Nazrul Islam had certain points of meeting: they were both courageous men, both felt for the wretched common man of Bengal, and were anti-imperialists. But their meeting was perhaps less significant than their parting, which was inevitable. Because they represented two widely different poles of a society and ways of looking at life. When Nazrul Islam met Fazlul Huq he was only twenty-one, Huq was forty-seven. Whereas the political leader had everything a successful man of his society would think it necessary to have, the poet had almost nothing, except his talents. Their family backgrounds were totally unlike each other. Fazlul Huq came from a well-to-do family in East Bengal; Nazrul Islam from a poor family in West Bengal. Fazlul Huq had spoken with force on

behalf of the peasants and workers, but only as their leader, not as one of them. He was like Rabindranath writing on, and feeling intensely for, the poor, and yet retaining an invincible distance from them. Nazrul Islam and Muzaffar Ahmad were different, for they were not leaders, they were only political workers who believed that the poor must be roused to overthrow the system of oppression under which they have been groaning for ages. Thus, the owner of the paper and its editors were, in the ultimate analysis, working at cross purposes. Fazlul Huq needed a newspaper in the same manner as important politicians of his time needed newspapers to project their personal images and to add to their political importance. The two young men whom he had given the editorial responsibility needed a newspaper because they wanted to preach the ideology of a social revolution. A breach was inevitable; but despite their differences they could have gone together for some time as they had a common enemy in the British Government. However, the government did not remain a silent spectator, soon it moved into action. First, it demanded a security deposit for the newspaper; next, it forfeited the deposit. A new, and larger deposit, was necessary before it could be brought out again. Huq was persuaded to deposit the amount, enabling the paper to resume publication. But Nazrul Islam did not stay with it any longer, his restlessness asserted itself, and he gave up his job. It is also certain that Fazlul Huq would not have agreed to go as far as Nazrul Islam was likely to have desired him to go, but that point was never reached owing to the poet's dissociation from the paper. The *Nava Yuq* was closed soon after Nazrul Islam's departure from it.

His next journalistic venture was made with the bi-weekly the *Dhumketu* (Comet). It approached the middle-class youth of Bengal in a very direct manner, talking of revolutionary violence rather than social change. Nazrul Islam undertook to do in journalism what terrorists of his own age were doing in a more secret area of operation.

The *Langal* (plough), which was launched after the *Dhumketu* had ended its brief and hectic life, was

nearer in spirit to the *Nava Yug* than its immediate predecessor ; for it took up the cause of the toiling masses. Behind this weekly was a political group which called itself the Labour *Swaraj* (Independence) Party of the Indian National Congress. This group proclaimed its faith in the complete independence of India based on political, social and economic equality of all men and women and adopted as its method for achieving this objective such a movement among the peasants and workers as would make them aware of their lost political rights and force them to snatch away their freedom from the hands of the selfish and powerful. Only sixteen issues of the weekly were published, but they were very well received and remembered. When in 1927 this political group organised itself into an independent political party called the Peasants' and Workers' Party of Bengal, the *Langal* was changed into the *Gana Vaani* (the message of the People). Nazrul Islam was elected a member of the Party's working committee and was the principal force behind the paper.

Those were troubled days of communal riots when Nazrul Islam was editing his papers and his was among the very few publications that talked about sanity and communal harmony. This was possible because he had been able to identify the enemy who was trying to befool others and had succeeded in doing so in no small measure.

Nazrul Islam wrote editorial essays with a warmth of sincerity capable of thawing the coldest of hearts. He wrote with involvement, in anger and in love. His editorials in the papers we mentioned above created sensation as they appeared. These have been anthologised in three volumes called *Yuga Vaani* (the Message of the Age), *Rudra Mangal* (in celebration of the violent), and *Durdiner Yatri* (the traveller through distress). Most of the essays were written on issues which were once very alive, but have lost their importance since. To the contemporary readers the appeal of these essays was enormous ; for the government they were so disturbing as to prompt it into the action of imprisoning the author. What Achintya Kumar

Sengupta, the novelist, wrote in his memoirs must have been felt by many of his generation :

On Saturday evenings we would, like many others, wait at Jagubabu's Market for the newsboy to come with his bundle of the *Dhumketu*. Then there would be a scramble to reach for the paper. Perhaps the editorial pen had been dipped in blood and not in ink, we thought. What language! They were not written to be read alone or read once. Poetry and prose were alike, songs of wreckage, of destruction and of obliteration...

The editorials articulated and supplied what the seething country felt and needed at that moment-- courage and hope, fury and anger. His reception was phenomenal.

His journalism became literature. To compare his style with Milton's in *Areopagitica* may appear to be stretching the truth; but there are qualities in Nazrul Islam's non-fictional prose which, given Milton's learning, preparation and antecedents, could have matured into Miltonic greatness. To take examples. On the killing of Indians by General O'Dyer :

Had not a stone-hearted butcher like Dyer killed us like dogs, do you think our ice-cold souls would have been roused by hurt feelings and grievances as it has been roused now, or our thwarted sense of dignity hissed like a trodden serpent as it is doing at the moment ?

Often he creates in the readers a feeling of disgust with a view to making them angry, as in the lines below :

Dead night. It is dark in front. There is no opening. There is no light. A destructive cyclone moans in a tune which chills the blood. And in the midst of all these he who is carrying my mother undraped is neither a monster nor a god, he is a man made of flesh and blood. Following behind are the three hundred and thirty million travellers through darkness.

Nazrul Islam's references to the mother are frequent, more frequent than Rabindranath's. He sees his country as his mother, and loves her with the filial affection of a son. He wrote in an essay called 'My beautiful': "Suddenly a relentless and frightening power began to pull me downwards. It said, 'to your mother, to your country you must repay, you who are mad'. Saying this my love for the earth embraced me warmly like a mother, it kissed me, it wept." What lent poignancy to his search for a mother was the failure of his own mother to live upto the ideal of motherhood Nazrul Islam had set up.

Like Burke's topical lectures, Nazrul Islam's journalism went far beyond the limits of the contemporary issues he had to comment on, because while dealing with the local he raised issues which were universal. Similarly when he wrote on a religious festival like the Muhurrum he wanted us to realize that the killing that had once taken place in Karbala is being perpetrated every day in British India. The Sakina who wept for her husband is still weeping, for her husband has been killed, now, only a moment ago.

This writer's understanding of problems was in no way less notable than his sincerity. Writing on the proposal for setting up a national university, he said :

What would be the curriculum of the national university? What would be its standard? Its programme? These are questions that call for an answer. It wouldn't do to go on whining that students are not coming to us, that everyone is running to the British institutions. You must do things whole-heartedly, and once you are able to do that you will not be required to call the students, they will come to your premises on their own and in thousands, crying, 'we are here! we have come'. If your charms fail to exorcise the ghost, you are to blame, not your charms. If you do not know how to dance, admit that, don't say that the ground was uneven.

We want our system of education to be such as to be able to awaken us, to make us alert and energetic.

Only that education is real which can feed our body as well as our mind. We don't want goody-goodies, we prefer the reckless.

National university was a sentimental issue but Nazrul Islam refused to take it sentimentally. He was a man of sentiments, but we would not allow his sentiments to cloud his perception.

Nazrul Islam's addresses were both emotionally pleasing and rhetorically persuasive. He spoke in many conferences and meetings, and wherever he spoke he roused those who thronged to listen to him. He paid rich tributes to the youth in the country in whom he saw hope, the only hope, of building up a new society. Wastage of youth has been one of the most painful and destructive facts of our life. Nazrul Islam did not want this wasting to continue. In 1932 he said in a youth conference :

I am not a speaker. I am a poet from whom words flow like a timid stream. But I have one asset, an unbounded love, an instinctive affection, for you. Since the very first day I learnt to sing I have been saluting, commending, showing respect to youth and the spirit of the young. Gathering together all my strength, I have been singing its glory in my songs and poems. With the wonder of the first man on this earth when he saw the young redder-than-red sun, I have seen youth on the day of my awakening ; as the first man paid his respectful compliments to the sun, so did I to the youth. The youthfulness that dispels darkness is an angel. It comes with colours, it ends in colours.

The first thing I want to say is this that this conference of young Muslims would be meaningless if we fail to revolt against senility. That which clings to the old and the false is senile. Those who fail to see clearly, those who are not only a burden but also a hindrance to the onward movement of new men and women, are old. I have seen youth in old age, and senility among the young.

He understood the spirit of the youth, and to the young in the country his appeal was as direct as it was effective.

He wrote essays on a wide variety of subjects. One of his finest pieces is called "World literature today". This is based on a very personal evaluation of the literature of the world. His judgments may not be wholly acceptable, but his preferences are revealing. He mentions the English romantic poets with respect but leaves out Wordsworth and Coleridge from his review. Nazrul Islam calls himself a poet of beauty and prefers to liken himself to Keats. Dostoevsky impressed him tremendously; he particularly admired Raskolnikov's utterance to Sonia, "I bow down not to you but to all sufferings in you" (*Crime and Punishment*). He also loved the Norwegian novelists, Knut Hamsun and Johan Bojer, who wrote on poverty and hunger. Nazrul Islam could hardly afford to have a library of his own. Impecuniosity dogged his footsteps. He did not, above all, have a settled home. Yet he was keenly aware of the issues that were being internationally talked about and commented upon in his time.

Another important essay is on "Muslims in Bengali literature". In it he sets forth his views on what literature should be like. "If we desire to leave our mark in literature, the first thing we must do is to eliminate from our writings all signs of stagnation and let it flow spontaneously and rapidly. Writings that are dull and stagnant and are bereft of vitality will do us no good and will never endure. Very few writers in Bengali show a boundless desire for freedom".

Nazrul Islam's letters are like those of D.H. Lawrence, they make excellent reading and will continue to give delight to whoever turns to them. Rabindranath had perfected the art of letter-writing: he knew that his letters would be valued by those who received them, he also knew that the letters would some day come out in print. Nazrul Islam wrote without any self-consciousness; he wrote warm, intimate and personal letters which he did not want to

be published. Reading them one sometimes has a feeling of prying on a person's privacy, but one is never sorry for having done so, for one is amply rewarded, not by any discovery of secrets but by a contact with a very rich and sensitive mind. We don't know how many letters he wrote, but he wrote many, many more than have been discovered and preserved.

III

Nazrul Islam published three books of short stories, consisting of eighteen short stories, and three novels. The titles of the collections of short stories are *Vether Daan* (the Gift of Sorrow), *Rikter Vedan* (the Sorrows of the Destitute), and *Shiuli Mala* (the Wreath of Shiuli). The novels are called *Vadhan Hara* (the Man Without Bondage), *Kuhelika* (the Mystery), and *Mrityu Khudha* (the Hunger of Death).

As the titles show, the writings are poetic in nature. He had neither the leisure nor the desire to look after plot construction and hence the plot constitutes the weakest part of his fictional writing. His stress was all on sentiments and the characters professing the sentiments. What moves the reader particularly is the language of the writer wherein it is impossible to miss the richness of his imagination.

Usually, his themes are melancholy, dealing with love of the unrequited kind. This preference creates around all his fictional writings a peculiar atmosphere of graceful melancholy. He does not reveal to us any great truths about human nature but shows how a particular character felt and suffered in life. At many places he is autobiographical and does not, consequently, write with detachment. This was a grave weakness. Nazrul Islam had wide experience, keen observation, rich language and vivid imagination—excellent virtues in a writer of fiction—but he did not know how to be objective, how to put on a mask, or to stand at a distance from the feelings and experiences he was grappling with.

His first short story, *Vaundeler Atmakahini* (the Autobiography of the Vagabond) came out in 1919. This was his first publication. It was followed, in the same year, by *Hena* and *Vethar Daan*.

Vaundeler Atmakahini has for its hero an indisciplined young soldier of the Bengal Regiment, obviously Nazrul Islam himself, who married Rabeya, a girl of thirteen, when he himself was nineteen. Two months later the young wife died. This dealt a great blow to the hero; he married again, but the second wife also died soon. Six months after that he lost his mother. In desperation the young man joined the army. This is the weakest of all his short stories, but is readable. *Rikter Bedan* (the Sorrows of the Destitute) also incorporates Nazrul Islam's experience in the army. The hero was imaginative and wayward, he loved a girl, Shaheda, but felt more attracted by the thrills of the battle-field. A conflict ensued, and finally he decided to join the army. During his stay in the army he learnt about Shaheda's unhappy marriage. A handsome gipsy girl, Gul, took a fancy to him, but the hero was unresponsive to her advances. The affair ended when Gul died from a gun-shot fired by the hero.

Dara, the hero in *Vethar Daan* (the Gift of Sorrow), went to the war leaving his beloved, Bedoura, behind. Bedoura lost her chastity to Saiful Mulk. Dara could not forgive Bedoura; the grief made him deaf and blind. The story ends happily with a reconciliation between Dara and Bedoura, illustrating the truth that purity of the mind is not always lost with purity of the body. The war remains in the background of these stories but the writer is more concerned with the suffering of the individuals. Life in an East Bengal village is reflected in three stories, called *Ziner Vadsha* (the King of the Demons), *Agni Giri* (the Volcano), and *Padma Gokhro* (the Cobra). In *Ziner Vadsha* and *Agni Giri* the heroes are young men. The former story begins in a light vein but ends on a serious note. It provides a picture of the colourful life in a village. *Agni Giri* is the story of a young man who was shy and innocent-looking and the butt of jokes of men who thought they

were very smart. But this young man, Sabur, suddenly erupted like a volcano when love for a girl, Noorjahan, entered his life.

Padma Gokhro is about a village woman who had lost her twins and had transferred her affection to two snakes. Nazrul Islam's treatment of the relationship between the woman and the snakes shows his pity for, and understanding of, the workings of the mind of a mother. There are several other stories in which he has transformed the supernatural into the natural. In his prose nature is as alive as it is in his poetry.

His novels have their weaknesses. But his characters are always vital: the impressions they make on us remain and refuse to fade away.

In *Kuhelika* (the Mystery) the hero is a young man, Jahangir the unmindful. He is an idealised character, a terrorist, and is, like the writer himself, prepared to undertake any amount of hardship and suffering for the sake of his country. But he is also a lover. The result is a conflict between love and duty. Jahangir has put his life at the command of the terrorist leaders and is sentenced to life-transportation but still the fire of love is ablaze in him. In the Alipore Jail he tells his friend Haroon, "You were right, poet, women are a mystery".

Jahangir does not understand women, but the novelist does. Nazrul Islam had fought in his poetry for the emancipation of women, he created in fiction women who were unmistakably alive. To women he gave the pride of place in many of his stories, and in all his novels he endowed women with a quality of life which is reinforced, continually, by the suffering inflicted on them by a heartless society. All his characters suffer, but women suffer more than men. The point must also be made here that whatever happens to them his women remain human. His lower-class women are even more vital than those belonging to the middle class. The most successful of his stories is called *Rakkashi* (the man-eating woman) and is about a woman who has been driven out of her society because she had killed her husband. She is a woman belonging to what is called the lower classes, but she has human qualities

which middle-class women are obliged to stifle. The story is presented to us in the form of a dramatic monologue. The woman is allowed to tell her story in one of the dialects used in northern Bengal, and the effect of her narration is very satisfying from the artistic point of view. Another remarkable woman is the "wife of the second brother" in *Mrityu Khudha* (the Hunger of Death) which is the best novel he wrote. This wife is a mother, and, as always, Nazrul Islam has excelled in bringing out the mother's affection for her children. She is a charming woman, both handsome and witty. "She is like a bowl of fire. Her beauty blazes like a flame. But to touch her is to get burnt. And it is this fear of getting scorched that forbade people to go too near her. She is like a rose from Basra, full of petals, but, also, of thorns. She is like a silent coin, all silver and no ore. But she does not ring. They know that that coin will not run a family. At the very best one could make an amulet with her". She is a realist: although Muslim by birth she embraces Christianity in the hope of gaining a means of livelihood from the Christian missionaries. But Nazrul Islam, who knew a mother whenever he saw her, shows us how this woman was also a mother whose life was woven with those of her children. The children in the novel are also very alive. Nazrul Islam's treatment of childhood in this novel reminds one of the poets who wrote the exquisite children's poems we discussed earlier. The children in this novel go without food, but they show no poverty of life. In fact, they are responsible for much of the richness of the novel.

The hero is a terrorist. "His statuesque figure the man has reduced, through neglect, to the semblance of a sculpture left in an abandoned place. All over his body he bore the marks of neglect". This man, Ansar, belonged to a family, but he has forsaken his family and relations. Men like Ansar were rare among the Muslims, but Nazrul Islam was far ahead of the community to which he was born. He came to Krishna-nagar, a mofussil town where Nazrul Islam had spent some time, to organise the poor workers into a movement. As an activist he believed that freedom could be won only through violent methods. Ansar establishes

contact with the slum-dwellers, and the "wife of the second brother" falls in love with him. Ansar loves Rubi, the widowed daughter of the District Magistrate of Krishnanagar. There is, however, no conflict, because "the wife of the second brother" knows how to conceal her feelings. Eventually Ansar gets arrested and is sent to prison, where he has an attack of tuberculosis. His two lovers meet the dying hero in the prison. The novel ends when Ansar dies.

Mrityu Khudha has, actually, two stories, the first of "the wife of the second brother" and the second of Rubi. The first fifteen chapters of the novel constitute the best part. These chapters are dominated by "the wife of the second brother" and offer us a dramatic picture of the slums where low-caste Muslims and converted Christians quarrel, fight and live side by side. The scenes are memorable. More than anywhere else, Nazrul Islam's power of observation manifests itself in this book. His rendering of the local dialect is also competent. A scene that every reader recalls with pleasure occurs near the water-tap where Muslim and Christian women launch upon each other a virulent attack. Picturesque and alive, the scene is one of the most life-like in Bengali fiction. As soon as the hero enters the story in the sixteenth chapter of the novel, the atmosphere changes. For here the novelist loses his objectivity, he becomes tense and involved. Nazrul Islam is in full sympathy with the political ideology of hero. About his hero's title to heroism we are left in doubt whatsoever, for everyone who comes in contact with him, especially the women, develop feelings of love and admiration for him.

Politics had not gone well with the Bengali novel. In Bankim Chatterjee's novels politics is presented as a kind of blind ritualism which draws its inspiration from religious nationalism. Saratchandra wrote a political novel in which an unconvincing but lovable man is trying to drive away the British with a view to securing for the middle class the places occupied by the rulers. In his *Char Addhay*, published four years after *Mirtyu Khudha*, Rabindranath alleged that politics of violence was nothing more than a means of escape

for men and women who were frustrated in life and had private axes to grind. As a novelist Nazrul Islam is inferior to them, but has is also different from them in his outlook on politics. The politics he offers us is real; and in *Mrityu Khudha* he has moved further ahead of terrorist politics, for Ansar believes that the way to liberation lies through communism. In writing this novel he was setting up a tradition in which later writers like Gopal Halder and Satinath Bhaduri wrote about young men who had seen in communism the road to real independence. The distance between Nazrul Islam's hero, who has left a comfortable home in response to the call of the militant politics in which he believes, and the hero in Abul Mansur Ahmed's *Jivan Khudha* (the Hunger of Life) who, born of poor parents, is seeking a compromise between his socialist views and his social necessity of making a comfortable living provides us with measure of the radicalness of Nazrul Islam's thinking. Abul Mansur Ahmed was one of his writer-friends; but while Abul Mansur, who was more progressive than many of his contemporary Muslims, had joined the Muslim League, Nazrul Islam kept himself away from communal politics. As he demonstrates in this novel, to the poor and the suffering religion is an irrelevance.

Mrityu Khudha shows the power of death, it shows how poverty, diseases and hopeless love are threatening warm and vital life. But, characteristically, and expectedly, Nazrul Islam has also shown how life is much more noble and powerful than death. A hunger for life is the supreme fact in the life of those who are dying; and in their cruel desire to live the poor are not prepared to do anything that they find necessary. To them religion is not as important as the middle-class tends to think it is. His depiction of poverty and of the poor is a testimony to his ability as an artist. Incidentally, his poem on poverty was written contemporaneously with this novel.

His first novel, *Vadhan Hara* (the Man without Bondage), serialised in a journal when Nazrul was twenty-one, is the weakest of the three. It is epistolary in form and has for its hero one Nurul Hooda. Two

friends, Mahbuba and Sophia, are in love with him. Unlike Jahangir and Ansar, Nurul Hooda is not a terrorist ; but he is a radical thinker and, like Nazrul Islam, is in revolt against the old and established values. Nurul Hooda is a two-dimensional character. He has an extraordinary capacity to suffer. He has joined the army, with perhaps the intention to run away from himself. It is obvious that Nazrul Islam has identified himself with the hero ; but he succeeds in rendering his women perfectly life-like, allowing them to play a full role in the life of men.

Vadhan Hara was published in 1927, and *Mrityu Khudha* in 1930. The difference between the two novels is not small. What was callow and unsure in the first novel has fully matured in the last. The poet in Nazrul Islam did not grow, but the novelist certainly did.

CHAPTER VI

IN AN IMAGINARY LAND

Whereas in his fictional writings, the real worlds of the war, of the terrorist movement and of the humble peasants and destitutes are present with a solidity, his plays create a half-lit world which guards against the entrance of what we normally call realism in literature. Nazrul Islam's plays are nearer to his songs and love poems than to his poems of revolt and prose works. It is not that the plays do not contain any message of revolt; they often do, but the naked grimness of life which we notice elsewhere is not to be found in his plays. As a prose writer Nazrul Islam accepted life, as a dramatist he idealized it.

All his plays are poetic, although he wrote them in prose. It would not have been unnatural for him to declaim, to write in mighty lines; but he does not. One finds that it is his other self which unfolds itself in these compositions. He uses songs liberally, and some of the songs are more well-known than the plays in which they occur. To him feelings and sentiments are more important than characters. Because he is romantic, he takes sides, like the English romantic poets, like Shelley in particular. Evil has no chance of winning, in fact evil is not properly accommodated in the plays, with the consequence that the conflict remains weak, the conclusion predetermined. The characterisation is, therefore, defective. Nor is he alive to the needs of plot-construction. Faulty these plays certainly are, but there is no mistaking the fact that they are written by a powerful, and a very original, writer.

It is pertinent to mention here that drama has never been the most successful branch of our literature. For one thing, we have more poets and novelists than dramatists; for another, theatre-going has not been one

of our national pastimes. Normal, middle-class life lacks drama, it produces sentiments as easily as it fails to produce sustained dramatic action and conflict. Traditionally, Bengal has been a land of poetry. What we call drama came from abroad, it did not grow from within to meet native needs and challenges. In getting themselves adapted to the local context and circumstances, the European models had to undergo changes. For example, even while translating Shakespeare Bengali dramatists have tended to add to the original texts songs of their own composition. The plea, therefore, has been made by some critics that Bengali plays should not be measured against their European counterparts and should rather be considered as a form of indigenous growth.

Of Nazrul Islam's plays the best is *Jhilimili* (the Shutters of the Window). This is a one-act play with a theme which appears to be social in character. But as the play proceeds one realizes that it has a symbolic dimension. We see at the beginning a sixteen-year-old girl, Firoza, lying on her sick-bed. Her father is the proud and conservative Mr. Mirza. All the windows in Firoza's room are closed. It is raining outside and Firoza's loving mother is trying to bring comfort to her ailing daughter. Firoza would like her mother to open the window on the east. The mother is unwilling to do so; because, she tells Firoza and also the audience, Mirza has ordered that the window must not be opened. But Firoza insists, and the mother obliges her. As the window is opened, a shadowy figure is seen at the window of the house in front. This is Habib who is reading for his B.A. degree and is in love with Firoza. Presently, Mirza enters. He is angry to see the window open. He does not like Habib who, "a God-forsaken scoundrel", is always singing and playing on musical instruments. "One cannot recite the *Quoran* or say the prayers for him," says the father, who himself is a graduate. But now that he finds that the daughter is suffering, the father takes pity on her and says that he would be agreeable to accept Habib as his son-in-law if the fellow can win his B.A., which the father is sure he will never be able to do. Habib comes and knocks

at the door, but Mirza rudely turns him away, saying that he must not dare to come before the results of the B.A. examination are published. On hearing this Firoza faints. The second scene is a dream sequence in which the lovers meet. In the third, Mirza goes out in search of Habib. But he is nowhere to be found. In vain does Firoza wait for him on her deathbed. And when, finally, Habib arrives with the news of his graduation, Firoza is no more among the living.

Pining for a union with his beloved, Habib represents the eternal man. Firoza is the eternal woman, separated from her lover. Mirza is the heartless society that hinders the union. Mirza's opposition to music and his failure to understand the love between young men and women identify him as the type which had opposed Nazrul Islam and all that Nazrul Islam stood for in real life. But he is not a villain, he loves his daughter, and comes, at the end, to the realization that Firoza must be allowed to marry Habib. Habib has no difficulty in obtaining the all-important B.A. degree; in fact he gets it with distinction. Consequently, there is no real conflict in the play. Yet Firoza must die, bringing pain to the living. Suffering is a reality in Nazrul Islam's world; sometimes it is a mirror in which the characters see themselves, as they do in this play. The mother is drawn with sympathy, and the relationship between her and her daughter is given the characteristic touch we see in other writings by Nazrul Islam.

It also rains in *Aleya* (the Mirage), which is a symbolic play. But the rains in *Aleya* do not bring sadness as they do in *Jhilimili*. The poet describes the theme of the play in these terms. "In the world of dust, love is a mirage. It is born in the watery grounds of soft moist land. To make the wayfarer lose his bearings is its intent. The sorrowful man leaps like an insect into its burning flames. Three men and three women, representatives of the eternal man and woman, were burnt in this fire. Of the three men one stands for beauty, another for sacrifice, and the third for power. The three women represent: the failure in women to love, the power of womanhood, and the tenderness in women."

The play uses the conventional materials of a mythological story: it has a court and its courtiers, dancers and singers, and an invading enemy. It also employs mythological rhetoric. But all these are loaded with a symbolic significance. In the play there are as many as thirty songs one of which makes fun of a bearded face.

Vhuter Bhoy (the fear of the ghosts) is an allegory. The hero is the "Prince of revolution", who rejects non-cooperation as a possible means of defeating the ghosts; he stands for total war. The woman comes and joins him. This is important, for Nazrul Islam not only believed that women must be liberated, he considered it impossible for men to achieve glory without the inspiration of women. The hero fights the mean and treacherous ghosts, and he dies, saying this to the woman. "I am not afraid of the power of the ghosts, but I fear their naked shamelessness.... You must go back, your job would be to seek out the youth looking for the path they have lost. Tell them of the path that lies across death. We have given our life to set the nation free from fear". It is not difficult to see who this hero is: he is Nazrul Islam himself, and also the youth of Bengal who believed in violence.

Nazrul Islam wrote several other one-act plays.

CHAPTER VII

THE SINGING VOICE

It has been pointed out that among the contributions the Muslims made to the culture of India, the most outstanding have been those to architecture and music. Eminent musicians like Amir Khosru, Mian Tansen and Bada Gulam Ali Khan belonged to the Muslim community. But the Bengali Muslims were beyond the limits of the tradition built up in Northern India. This isolation ran parallel to, and was perhaps increased by, Bengal's political separation from the rest of India; for even during the rule of the great Mughals, Bengal lived aloof from other parts of the sub-continent.

However, the Muslims in Bengal had developed a tradition of folk music. This was different from the sophisticated classical music of Northern India and it lacked a regular grammar. Nevertheless it was very popular among the uneducated villagers. The folk tunes were sung by boatmen and cartmen as they rowed their boats and drove their carts. But the educated sections of the community failed to develop a taste for music. The Mirza we met in the last chapter was not an exceptional person; his dislike of music was typical of the Muslim middle classes in Bengal. Mirza is anti-life, he is responsible for the death of his daughter Firoza. Middle-class Muslim life was bent upon destroying the youth, the vitality, the joy of life represented by Firoza and her lover. Singing and dancing were forbidden. Life had become barren and unproductive. The bigots, most of whom were educated, alleged that the arts were interdicted by the holy injunctions. Whatever music existed in the less puritanical and aristocratic sections was imported from outside Bengal and practised by professional musicians.

Nazrul Islam was the first and the most important Muslim poet in Bengal to enter the field of music. He composed at a prodigious speed, and has left for us about two thousand and five hundred songs, which number is next only to Rabindranath's. He sang in a not-very-melodious but a very moving voice. He set his songs to music, and trained the musicians. Nazrul Islam made the Muslim middle classes change their attitude to music; and if to-day we have young men and women who have devoted themselves to music, it is a development which was initiated by him. The boy who began his life as a composer for village performers performed a miracle becoming a composer for the whole nation.

Exorbitance has been the key-note of Nazrul Islam's genius. Songs are shy and sensitive things, they are incapable of holding boisterousness. Nazrul Islam did not compromise his exorbitance while writing his songs, yet he did not allow it to become unwieldy. The delicate balance, the equilibrium he maintained between emotion and discipline lent to his songs their peculiar energy, their charming radiance of life. He wrote on themes varying from the revolutionary to the devotional, from the serious to the comic; he used the modern form as well as the classical, the very familiar as well as the very new. He has written choruses for the freedom fighters, many of which were sung during our liberation movement and will be sung by the proletariat in what Nazrul Islam has called 'the ultimate war'. He wrote for the lovers, for the peasants, for films and for political meetings. The songs he wrote for the students show his great understanding of the mind of the young. Songs designed to rouse the people had been written by Rabindranath and D. L. Roy before Nazrul Islam, but the boldness and energy we notice in Nazrul's patriotic songs were something new in Bengal.

During the time he was very active as a composer the songs which were in the greatest demand were those on Islamic subjects like the Eid, Ramadan, Muhurrum, the Prophet, and Allah. Like Christ in Anglo-Saxon-poetry, the Islamic heroes have undergone a change in Nazrul Islam's songs; they have become local, and, therefore,

familiar and appealing. The Muslims were in need of these songs. Naturally he won the fondest affection of his co-religionists. But Nazrul Islam wrote with equal felicity on Hindu themes. This was unique in the history of Bengali songs. It is necessary to recall that communalism had riven the world of music as well; for example, one of the Muslim singers of Nazrul's songs had to pretend that he was not a Muslim for fear that Hindu buyers might not buy his records, and a Hindu singer who sang Nazrul's Islamic songs had to assume a Muslim name to attract the prospective Muslim buyers.

His best and most enduring songs are those which he wrote on love. Some of these are poems, but they unfold their full beauty only when they are sung as songs. The world of his love songs is not different or far away from that of his love poems. Here he is romantic and melancholy. Suffering is the very *raison d'être* of his lovers, they cry in pain, as they complain of unreturned love and bow in supplication to the beloved like a vassal to his lord. But they are not selfless, they are sensuous men to whom the beloved is an object of desire. She is at once known and mysterious; and it is because she is very near and yet beyond reach that she continues to be charming. The lover weeps, but he is not sorry that he does. He is emotional, aware of himself, and he needs the woman, because without her he is incomplete. In the love songs metaphors are taken from nature: flowers, birds, the sky, the rains—all these familiar objects are present, but like the sun that gives the old world a new life every morning the poet makes them new.

Nazrul Islam was at once a composer and a poet, a combination that is not very usual in Bengal. With the exception of Rabindranath and D. L. Roy, few of our poets have written songs and most of our musicians stand aloof from poetry. Many poets were writing contemporaneously with Nazrul Islam, but none among them showed any great aptitude for music. As a rule, Bengali songs, unlike those in the classical tradition, give equal importance to the words and the tune. In Nazrul

Islam, as in Rabindranath, the words are as important as the tune; the meaning and the technique, the matter and the manner are happily blended to form an organic, and not a mechanical, unity. Nazrul Islam set the words to music, trained the singers in the studios of gramophone companies and worked as a music director in a couple of films and also at the Calcutta station of All-India Radio. Very often he was obliged to write songs to earn a living. A smaller man would have exhausted himself, Nazrul Islam did not. He repeated without being repetitive; and he knew how to turn a necessity into an advantage.

Nazrul Islam was a daring adventurer in music. Breaking old forms, mixing old with new, borrowing tunes and rhythms from abroad, he made experiments which were an outstanding success and were justly popular. Earlier Rabindranath and D. L. Roy had enriched Bengali music by introducing Western tunes. But Nazrul Islam was the first musician to set his eyes on the rich musical heritage of the Middle Eastern countries. With equal skill he revived certain South Indian tunes. He was also responsible for the introduction of Arabic, Persian and Turkish rhythms. Not content, he let his imagination travel to England and Russia, and even to Cuba. Some of his best songs he composed in mixed melodies of folk songs and classical music.

The cumulative effect of these experiments was an extension in the breadth and scope of music in Bengal. Its expressiveness as well as appeal was greatly increased. The tunes he brought from abroad contributed an exotic colour to our music. Buddhadeva Bose is entirely correct in his analysis that Nazrul's songs gave the singers a great freedom. "Although", writes Buddhadeva, "Rabindranath was (and remained) unapproachable not only in poetry but also in taste, his music did not allow improvisation, which was contrary to Indian tradition, and could be discouraging for really capable singers, many of whom eagerly turned to this (Nazrul's) music which was new and living and at the the same time allowed the powerful voice freely to exercise its faculties."

Then there were his patriotic songs which sought to unite the various sections of the community and inspired young men and women in their struggle for independence. Subbhaschandra Bose, who later fled from the country and founded the INA, was the main speaker at a civic reception for Nazrul Islam held in Calcutta in 1929. In his speech Subbhaschandra said, "To read his songs is to be inspired. I am not musical in temperament, but during my stay in the prison whenever I read his songs I felt like singing them. A time shall come when we shall march to the battle-field to the tune of his songs. I have toured all the provinces in India and heard patriotic songs in the local languages, but I am yet to hear a more inspiring song than Nazrul's 'the unscaled mountains and the vast desert you must cross at night, beware, ye travellers'"

He was equally good at comic songs. He wrote on subjects like the League of Nations, the Dominion Status, the Round Table Conference, the Education Bill and the Symon Commission.

Nazrul Islam was lucky in having as one of his exponents Abbasuddin Ahmed, whom the poet himself had inspired to take to singing. Abbasuddin recorded Nazrul's songs, and the records had a phenomenal sale. An idea about the ease and rapidity with which Nazrul Islam composed can be had from the following account given by Abbasuddin.

One day in the rehearsal room (of a gramophone company) I was alone, singing a folk song of my district. I had not noticed that Nazrul was overhearing from near the door. No sooner had I finished the song than he entered the room, saying, "Beautiful, how pleasant is the tune. Abbas, sing again." I did. He requested me to sing again, and then again ... I had to sing it about six times. "Now, keep quiet," he said, took a pen and started writing a song. After about ten minutes he handed me a sheet of paper, saying, "will this fit into the tune of your folk song?"

It has not been possible to preserve full texts of the two thousand five hundred songs that he wrote. Many of these have been lost.

The songs of Nazrul Islam are a class by themselves. Rich in diction and tune, more varied than Rabindranath's, his songs will endure even after some of his more topical prose writings have been forgotten.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COUNTRY'S DEBT

Every year, when we, in Bangladesh, celebrate the birth anniversary of Nazrul Islam, we not only remember a poet of unusual abilities but also pay our homage to a hero who has put us under a great debt of gratitude. We are in need of heroes, because we are, and have been, living in distress and misery. And in our creation of, and turning to, heroes, political and literary, there is, more than anything else, an expression of our helplessness.

Carlyle had noted that the idea of a hero prevailing in a society is indicative of the values cherished by its members. That we have accepted Nazrul Islam as a hero testifies to several things. First, it shows that we expect from literature both instruction and delight. To us a great poet is not a mere creator of beauty, he is also a figure of our pride, an architect of national identity and unity. In fact all our great poets and writers have satisfied this double test, aesthetic and national. Bankimchandra's novels worked as a source of inspiration for the young Congress workers ; two of Rabindranath's songs have been accepted as the national anthems of India and Bangladesh. Secondly, literature constitutes the most dominant element and form of expression of our culture. It is the culture of the town-dwelling middle class that matters, and the middle class is educated. Entrance into the folds of the middle class depends on the acquiring of education. The fuss that the father in Nazrul Islam's play *Jhilimili* makes over the question of a B. A. degree is farcical and yet understandable, for a degree is an essential part of the equipment of a person who hopes to make a reasonable living. Most of those whom we assign to the middle class are richer in education than in property. Hence, again, the importance of literature. A third significance relates to the eradication of the disease of communalism ; and it augurs us well.

Communalism has been an old and deep-seated disease in Bengal. The partition of Bengal in 1947 was a tragedy, and, like tragedies in literature, it had proved to be inevitable. The Muslim middle class of the time of Nazrul Islam feared the Hindu bourgeoisie. The well-to-do Hindus had also lost meaningful contact with the Muslims. It is not without significance that the rich literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries failed to reflect the life of the Muslims. Nazrul Islam was above communalism, but even he had to put up with ugly manifestations of the malady. Two incidents are worth recalling. One involved his stay in a boarding house in Calcutta and the other the impulsive action of a Hindu girl in making him a present of a necklace. After his return from the army, Nazrul Islam stayed for sometime in a Calcutta boarding house with his boyhood novelist-friend Sailoananda. Everything went on well, he was liked by all the inmates of the house. Then one day things changed when it was discovered that he was a Muslim. On another occasion a Hindu girl, who heard Nazrul Islam recite one of his poems, wanted to offer him her necklace as a tribute to him. She did. And she suffered for what she did. The social resentment that followed was so bitter and loud that the poor girl was obliged to end her life taking nitric acid.

Nazrul Islam's birth anniversary provides this communally divided society with an opportunity of coming together. Most of our festivals are religious; the two communities stand apart in life, and more so when they go to their festivals. The celebration of a day connected with a poet is one of those secular and non-communal occasions of which we do not have many in our country.

The impact Nazrul Islam made on the community he was born to was unique. Muslims were poor, and they were exceedingly self-conscious. Doubts were expressed by some of them as to whether Bengali was their mother tongue. To-day this sounds absurd, but this is a fact of history. Those among Bengali Muslims who considered themselves part of an All-Indian aristocracy thought it beneath their dignity to speak in Bengali. Sir Syed Ahmed's founding of a society for translating English texts into Urdu was a progressive

move, but Nawab Abdul Latif's insistence on the Bengali Muslims' cultivation of Urdu was totally reactionary. For this Nawab, whose title bears testimony to the service he rendered to the British masters, was asking his co-religionists in Bengal to uproot themselves from the land from which they drew their sustenance. Abdul Latif was a contemporary of Bankimchandra, they were both graduates and civil servants. Bankimchandra began his literary career with a novel written in the English language, but the novelist had the instinctive wisdom of a great writer and he turned to Bengali immediately afterwards. Later he wrote a memorable expose of the Bengali *Babu*, the English educated Bengali gentleman. But Nawab Abdul Latif always wrote in English and thought Urdu was his vernacular. The difference in attitude and outlook between the two persons is symptomatic of the difference between the Hindu and Muslim middle classes. The Muslims of Bengal owe not an insignificant part of their literary backwardness to the leadership of the Nawab Abdul Latif.

Nazrul Islam brought back to our language words and idioms that had withdrawn themselves rather shamefacedly from the area of sophisticated letters and were living in the dim and illiterate world of metrical romances. An inferior artist could not have done this; a less courageous artist would not have wanted to do this. He was a major writer, and like all major writers he had to break away from the established conventions. In giving literary respectability to words of Muslim origin, he extended the expressiveness of our language. Also, he introduced and popularised in Bengali literature Muslim myths, legends and stories. It would not be incorrect to say that Nazrul Islam's contribution was even greater than Rabindranath's in the work of making Bengali literature, which had hitherto been the exclusive preserve of only one religious community, non-communal. With him literature in Bengali came to be a matter of pride for both communities.

To the educated members of his community Nazrul Islam brought a message of hope. They felt, as they had

never felt before in this century, that they were not inferior to anyone and that they need not be ashamed of themselves. But the message was not confined to the reading public alone: through his songs, which were very popular, it reached even those who could not read or write. To say this is not to suggest that his role was wholly, or even mainly, negative. Because he not only dispelled the feeling of inferiority prevailing among the Muslims but also created in them a desire to achieve glory in life. When Ismail Hossain Shirajee, a great orator and a writer of considerable talents, wired ten rupees to the poet, saying "Don't refuse; I would have sent you ten thousand if I could", he did something which everyone of his Muslim readers had felt like doing. The gesture was characteristic of the passionate man that Shirajee was, but the sentiment that the gesture embodied was shared by the entire body of middle-class Bengali Muslims.

True there were some who were initially hostile to the poet. They were opposed to the practice of the arts on what they called moral and religious grounds, and to them what was religious was also moral, and *vice versa*. But once they had read his poems or, as was more likely, heard his songs on Islamic subjects they had to surrender. He did not take much time to make the conquest of his community complete. After Nazrul Islam, Bengali Muslims were not what they had been before.

Others, politicians and writers, had tried contemporaneously with Nazrul Islam to rouse the Muslims. But their success could hardly be compared with his. A.K. Fazlul Huq had worked for and among the Muslims, but so far as the creation of a new awareness is concerned Nazrul Islam had done more valuable work than Fazlul Huq. Shirajee was a great organiser, he had spoken to large gatherings, and had written oratorical prose urging Muslims to rise up and occupy their rightful place. But Nazrul Islam's appeal was far greater in both dimension and effectiveness.

Between him and the Shirajees of Bengal there was yet another difference. For they were revivalists wanting to go back to a mythological and imaginary past which

they had painted with all the colours they could think of. That the past had sunk beyond recovery was a fact they were not prepared to admit. It is true that Nazrul Islam had also sung of the past, he could hardly avoid doing that, but he did not sing in the strain of an impoverished aristocrat boasting of his ancestors' wealth. He knew that the past was dead, but he also knew that the past could be used to measure the indignity of the present. That is why the past and the present work out a parallelism in his writings. His eyes were firmly planted on the present; and more than the physical glories and grandeur of the past, he loved and cherished the values that he thought gave the past its glory. He wanted the present to be overhauled in accordance with those values. His reply to a letter Ebrahim Khan had written him states his position very clearly :

Whether the Bengali Muslims are poor in material wealth I do not know, but I have the painful realization that they are really poor in mind and that to excess....It is not true that I have not won recognition from the Muslims. The love and affection with which the young Muslims—the real life of the country—have received me have buried all the thorns of depreciation underneath.

The real vitality of Islam lies in its recognition of the worth of the people, its democratic ideal, and its faith in universal brotherhood and equality of man. The uniqueness and greatness of Islam are recognized not only by me, but also by those who are not Muslims. This great truth of Islam can be the theme of not only a poem but an epic. An insignificant poet as I am, in many of my writings I have tried to sing the glory of Islam. But these efforts have never overstepped poetry, nor can they. In that case they will cease to be poetry....I know that the greatest good of the country lies in the uplift of the Bengali Muslims. The fact that the awakening of their self is yet to take place is the greatest obstacle in the way of the independence of India.

We see Nazrul Islam's greatness very clearly if we place him beside his contemporaries, both Muslim and Hindu. Ghulam Mustafa was envious of Nazrul Islam's reputation, and had parodied him in one of his poems. The difference between the two poets does not lie only in their technical skill, although that difference is not small, it lies also in Nazrul Islam's wide-awake acquaintance with what was happening around him and, more importantly, in his ability to grasp the new spirit that was abroad in Bengal after the First World War. That Ghulam Mustafa should turn into an official poet of the Pakistan Government, serve on a committee set up for devising means for harming the Bengali language, and devote himself to the work of bringing about Pakistanisation of Nazrul Islam need not surprise us. For he suffered from middle-class opportunism, as did many others of his class. Ebrahim Khan, who had a great admiration for Nazrul Islam and had written plays on the heroes of modern Turkey, became first a Muslim Leaguer and then a member of the National Assembly set up by Ayub Khan. Jasimuddin had written excellent poems on life in Bengali villages, but had failed to withstand the lure of middle-class comforts and security; consequently, he was obliged to use his poetic talents as a means of climbing the social ladder, and after the establishment of Pakistan his reputation of being a poet and his actual writing of poetry moved in contrary directions. Qazi Emdadul Haq was a competent novelist, but while Nazrul Islam wrote on working-class life and movement, he wrote on problems of social adjustment between the different sections of the Muslim middle class. These writers were incapable of growth, they lacked a consistent way of looking at life. Nazrul Islam's superiority was more qualitative than quantitative.

Nazrul Islam stands also above the contemporary and urbanised Hindu writers whom we mentioned in Chapter IV. It is to be noted that the most successful writers in Bengal have been those who had a proper understanding of, and contact with, life beyond the middle class. Michael Mudhusudan Dutt had become a Christian, travelled to Europe, and taken a European

wife. But the strength of his epic lines did not come from Europe alone, it came primarily from life in his contemporary Bengal which included life in the villages. Without the creative energy that found expression in his two farces, in which he holds up to ridicule excesses of the young and the old alike, he could not have written his epic on the death of Meghnad. Bankimchandra was a great novelist because he knew the whole of Bengal. He had written not only on fictitious history, but also on the tillers of the soil and on the necessity of establishing social justice. The same is true about Rabindranath and Saratchandra. And it was here that despite his remarkable gifts of imagination and control over language, Buddhadeva Bose was circumscribed, for he was unable to go beyond the class to which he belonged. It has been pointed out that his heroes do not have any contact even with their servants, let alone those who live outside the social circle. A part of the poetic greatness of Jibanananda Das is attributable to the poet's turning to the villages of Bengal as distinguished from the towns. Nazrul Islam belonged to this class of writers. He will live, because he was more than a member of the middle class. He was freer than those who proclaimed that they were uninhibited and claimed that they belonged to the large European tradition. He dreamt of a happy and liberated society; his poetry makes us see this society as also to aspire for it.

We have more than one reason to be grateful to Qazi Nazrul Islam.

HIS BOOKS

1. *Vayther Daan*, The Gift of Sorrows (short stories), 1922
2. *Agni Vina*, The Burning Lute (poems), 1922
3. *Yuga Vaani*, The Message of the Age (essays), 1922 (proscribed)
4. *Dolan Chapa*, Yellow Flower (poem & songs), 1923
5. *Rajvandar Javanvandi*, Deposition by a Prisoner, 1923
6. *Visher Vanshi*, The Poison Flute (poems), 1924 (proscribed)
7. *Vaangar Gaan*, The Songs of Destruction (songs), 1923 (proscribed)
8. *Rikter Vedan*, The Sorrows of the Destitute (short stories), 1925
9. *Chhayanaat*, (Indian Melody) (poems & songs), 1924
10. *Chittanama*, (poems & songs), 1925
11. *Puver Hawa*, Eastern Wind (poems & songs), 1925
12. *Shaemmovadi*, One who believes in Communism (poems), 1925
13. *Durdiner Yatri*, The Traveller through Distress (essays), 1926 (proscribed)
14. *Rudra Mangal*, In Celebration of the Violent (essays), 1926
15. *Sharvahara*, The Proletariat (poems & songs), 1926
16. *Jhingey Phul*, the cucurbitaceous flower (children's poems), 1926
17. *Sindhu Hindol*, Undulation on the Ocean (poems), 1927
18. *Vadhan Hara*, The Man Without Bondage (novel), 1927

19. *Phani Manasha*, The Cactus (poems & songs), 1927
20. *Zinzir*, The Chains (poems & songs), 1928
21. *Bulbul*, The Nightingale (songs), 1928
22. *Sanchita*, Collected Poems, 1928
23. *Sandhya*, The Evening (poems & songs), 1929
24. *Chakravak*, The Flamingo (poems), 1929
25. *Sat Vhai Champa*, The Seven Brothers (children's poems), date not given.
26. *Chokher Chatak*, The Thirsty for Sight (songs), 1929
27. *Chandravindu*, The Nasal Mark (songs), date not given (proscribed).
28. *Prolay Sikha*, The Flame of Devastation (poems & songs), 1930 (proscribed).
29. *Mrityu Khudha*, The Hunger of Death (novel), 1930
30. *Jhilimili*, The Shutters of the Window (plays), 1930
31. *Nazrul Geetika*, Nazrul's Songs, 1930
32. *Aleya*, The Mirage (play), 1931
33. *Kuhelika*, The Mystery (novel), 1931
34. *Nazrul Swaralipi*. (notations of his songs), 1931
35. *Shiuli Mala*, The Wreath of Shiuli (short stories), 1931
36. *Sur Saki*, The Serving Maid of Melodies (songs), 1931
37. *Rubaiyat-e-Hafiz*, (translation), 1931
38. *Zulfikar*, The Sword of Ali (songs), 1931
39. *Vana Geeti*, Woodland Songs, 1932
40. *Gul Vagicha*, The Flower Garden (songs), 1933
41. *Putuler Viye*, The Doll's Marriage (children's play), 1933
42. *Kavye Ampara*, Verse translation of the Ampara, 1933
43. *Geeti Shatadal*, One Hundred Songs (songs), 1934
44. *Suralipi*, Notations, 1934
45. *Sur Mukur*, The Mirror of Melodies (songs), 1934
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47. *Nirjhar*, The Spring (poems), 1939
48. *Natun Chand*, The New Moon (poems), 1945
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